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MY BOYHOOD

MY BOYHOOD.

MY BOYHOOD.

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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MY BOYHOOD;

A Story Book for Boys.

By H. C. BARKLEY,

AUTHOR OF "BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND THE BLACK SEA."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE.

SINCE writing the narrative of "My Boyhood," it has struck me my readers, should I be fortunate enough to have any, may be interested in knowing how it was I came to write it, and further, what could induce me to make it public. Well, it was in this wise. As every one knows, we have had, during the past summer, about four wet days to one fine one; and this, as my youngsters know, has kept me much racked with rheumatism, much in my arm-chair, and very much at their mercy. And as they, poor little mortals, have, from the first of these evils, been frequently debarred from their usual excursions to the dogs, &c., they have devoted their energies to tormenting me, and, on an average, once in every half hour one or other of my disturbers has pulled at my hair, coat-sleeve, table-leg, or book, and begged in a pleading voice that I would just "'peak about 'Pepper' and 'Wasp,'" which, being interpreted into grown-up language, means, "go on telling us tales for ever," for no sooner has one tale been brought to a satisfactory end than I have been told to "go on;" and

if I have been driven to declare that I have got to the end of all things, I have been met with a deep-drawn sigh, an abstracted stare, and a request to begin all over again. "Just 'peak about 'Pepper' and 'Wasp.'" And so, as the wet days have gone on in an apparently unending succession, and dreading the days when deep snow and storms will set in and keep me further a prisoner, I have, in self-defence, written out all my stories, in the hope that when small hands, and small tongues, wistful eyes, and pleading looks beset me, I may (if very interested in my paper) say, "Here, take this book and get Nurse to read it." And though Nurse reading it is not quite the same thing as my "'peaking it," yet I have through this had so many quiet moments to myself that I have determined to give these pages to the printer, in the hope they may keep other children quiet, and allow here and there an unfortunate old rheumatic parent to be left alone on a wet day to enjoy his book or newspaper. Should I succeed in this, I shall feel I have done some little good, and shall have been amply rewarded for the trouble I have taken.

I know there are many errors in the book, and that as a boy I did many things I should not, but I trust my readers will be lenient to the former and kindly overlook the latter, for they will see I "went to the

dogs" before I was into my teens, and therefore much cannot be expected from an old fellow who made such a bad beginning.

I know they will skip all the accounts of my evil doings, and deeply ponder over those that are good (if there are any); for since my days boys are not the young limbs my old nurse said I was.

I therefore confidently leave my book to them,—confidently, because I know it will do them no harm, and trusting that when the dogs in the back yard are not to be got at on account of bad weather, my poor attempts may help them to while away the weary hours.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

GOING TO THE DOGS.—SHARING A KENNEL.—PINCHER AND CRIB.—OLD MASTER.—PEPPER AND WASP.—PUPPYHOOD . 1

CHAPTER II.

EDUCATION.—THE FIRST RAT.—JUVENILE COURAGE.—FETCHING AND CARRYING.—A SACRED CHARGE.—A NARROW ESCAPE. 12

CHAPTER III.

VILLAGE COMPANIONS.—A READY TONGUE.—THE OLD BUCK.—A STAND-UP FIGHT.—A NIGHT OF SORROW.—A MORNING OF JOY.—A HAPPY MOTHER.—AN INDIFFERENT FATHER.—NEW FERRETS.—DOGS IN HARNESS 21

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST VISIT.—IMPALED ON A RAT-SPADE.—COLLECTING EGGS.—THE FIRST NESTS.—ROBBING A CHURCH.—NESTING 3

CHAPTER V.

LEARNING TO SWIM.—NEARLY DROWNED.—OUR FOREFATHERS' CREED.—A BED OF NETTLES.—FISHING.—STICKLE-BACKS.—WONDERS OF THE DEEP.—A TWENTY-POUND PIKE.—THE WHITE BULL.—SALTED DOWN FOR THE NAVY . . . 33

PAGE

CHAPTER VI.

OLD BACON.—THE POACHERS.—A FATAL SHOT.—A SPOILT BOY. 51

CHAPTER VII.

RURAL SUPERSTITION.—A WISE WOMAN.—SETTING A MARK.—THE EVIL EYE ON THE CUCUMBERS.—BOASTING.—YOUNG POACHERS.—CAUGHT IN THE ACT.—RATTLING DOWN THE BROOK 60

CHAPTER VIII.

COURSING.—SAD CATASTROPHE.—THE CUNNING OF THE HARE.—STEEL TRAPS.—FIRE.—A RUSTIC HERO.—"LIST TO THE POOR ROGUES" 72

CHAPTER IX.

SPARROW CATCHING.—PARTRIDGES IN THE NET.—TRICKED.—SOLD AGAIN.—SPARROW PUDDING.—STEALING A TAIL.—BUYING DUCKS.—CLEVER COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION . . 83

CHAPTER X.

A WINTER'S WALK.—FORAGING FOR A DINNER.—AN ENGAGED SISTER.—A BROTHER-IN-LAW.—SKATING.—A NOVEL CARRIAGE-AND-FOUR 93

CHAPTER XI.

THESE DEGENERATE DAYS.—THE GOOD OLD TIMES.—FROZEN ON THE COACH.—WELSH PONIES.—SPOILING A HORSE.—SWEEP AND GREY NELSON.—DONKEY TAKING A BATH . 103

CHAPTER XII.

HORSE *versus* DOG.—STABLE ON FIRE.—RIDING A BULLOCK.—SHOOTING.—OUR FIRST SHOTS 113

PAGE

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER.—A CRIMEAN GOAT IN A FIX.—OCTOBER SHOOTING.—SNIPE SHOOTING.—SUSPENDED OVER A BROOK.—A RIDICULOUS MISTAKE 121

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRUTAL OUTRAGE.—JUST RETRIBUTION.—A TRAGEDY . . 133

CHAPTER XV.

THE WEASEL.—A POLECAT AT THE DECOY.—MOUSE-HUNTER AND HAWK.—A TRAP FOR A BOY.—HANDED OVER TO JUSTICE.—PARDONED.—PHEASANT SHOT IN SEPTEMBER . . 141

CHAPTER XVI.

FOOLISH PRACTICAL JOKING. — MY DREADFUL TAIL. — THE GLEBE-FARM.—LITTLE MARY.—LITTLE MARY'S LOVERS.—LITTLE MARY'S HUSBAND.—GETTING INTO DIFFICULTIES.—CRUSHED TO DEATH 154

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HARRIERS.—THE STAGHOUNDS.—"LOR', MA, HERE'S THE DICKEY!" 167

CHAPTER XVIII.

VARIOUS DOGS.—AMONG THE RABBITS.—BURIED ALIVE.—EARNING OUR FUN.—A BROKEN NOSE 178

CHAPTER XIX.

SUNDAYS.—OUR CHURCH.—"LOR' DER ME."—SUNDAY EVENINGS 187

PAGE

CHAPTER XX.

MARSHFORD.—GOING TO THE FAIR.—THE HORSE AUCTION.—THE FROLIC FAIR.—PATRONISED BY HER MAJESTY.—DEGENERATE DAYS 196

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAST INSTEAD OF A FEAST.—A HORSE IN THE HOUSE.—A PENSIONED HUNTER.—LOOKING "PIGGY."—DOMINIE, THE PARSON'S HOBBY.—MOONLIGHT STEEPLECHASES.—HOLDING THE DOCTOR'S HORSE.—A RACE IN NIGHT-GOWNS . . 206

CHAPTER XXII.

A VENOMOUS RAT'S BITE.—LEFT ALONE.—FOREGOING A PLEASURE.—ONE-EYED JACK.—MY NEW PONY.—IN HASTE TO THE WEDDING.—A 'CUTE RUSTIC 217

CHAPTER XXIII.

REASON OR INSTINCT.—THE GOOSEBERRY PICKER.—GOING TO SCHOOL.—TWO WAYS OF TELLING A TALE 230

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

From Sketches by A. C. CORBOULD. *Engraved by* J. W. WHYMPER.

	PAGE
SHARING A KENNEL	1
A NARROW ESCAPE	19
DOGS IN HARNESS	29
ROBBING A CHURCH	34
WASP AND PEPPER	47
YOUNG POACHERS	66
RICK ON FIRE	81
STEALING TAIL	89
SKATING	99
RIDING BULLOCK	116
GOAT IN A FIX	125
WEASEL AND HAWK	145
WOULD YE?	165
THE MEET	176
TOWZER AND LION	179
MUSICIANS AT CHURCH	191
THE HORSE FAIR	199
PIGGY	211
MY NEW PONY	226
PEPPER AT CROMER	231

SHARING A KENNEL.

MY BOYHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

GOING TO THE DOGS.—SHARING A KENNEL.—PINCHER AND CRIB.—OLD MASTER.—PEPPER AND WASP.—PUPPYHOOD.

THERE are few people who "go to the dogs" before they are out of their teens, and fewer still before they are into them, but if there is a grain of truth in all the chaff of old nurse's tales, I must have taken to what is generally supposed to be this pernicious habit, about

the same time that I took to standing and running as humans do, and gave up the dog form of locomotion.

Hannah Wiseman, my old nurse, says there never was such a young limb as I was at this early period of my life, and that I was never good nor quiet for a moment, except when standing looking at old Trim chained up in the back-yard, and "a agrawating of the poor beast by saying 'bow-wow' at him over and over again till he was ready to devour me." I cannot vouch for the truth of all this, and do not much believe in my having been such a bad boy, but certainly my earliest recollection is connected with "going to the dogs." I suppose I had been turned out into the garden for a run whilst nurse was busy and that I had wandered round to the back of the house, past the stables and pig-stye, to the big walnut tree under which stood Keeper's kennel. I am not very clear about my details, but I shall never forget the storm that broke over my devoted head when I was discovered jammed tight into the kennel with my arms round old Keeper's neck and his lovely red tongue lolling out about half an inch from my face as he sat squeezed up enjoying a chat with me. The best of it was nurse was in a horrid fright of Keeper, and believed that he was ever ready to eat small children, so she kept on saying "poor old Keeper" to him and paying him the most bare-faced compliments in one voice, whilst in very different tones she assured me that there never was such a naughty wicked boy, and that I was to come out that very minute, and whatever would my Ma say!

Now Keeper and I had got on splendidly and felt by no means inclined to part company, so it was only after *the lapse of some* considerable time, during which

nurse had gone over all her blandishments to him and scoldings to me a dozen times, and as she expressed it, "put herself in a pucker" that I was at last induced to come out by the threat that if I did not I should have no tea.

I was very young, or before doing so I should have insisted on a proper agreement being drawn up exempting me from all punishments, for no sooner was I out of the reach of my dear old friend Keeper, than I was seized by the wrist, and dragged off with the one cutting remark, "Just look at your nice clean pinny." Away we went, in at the back door, up the back stairs, and with a bang behind me I was shoved into the brush closet with the remark, "There, get into mischief now if you can," an order I at once obeyed by thrusting a small stone I had unconsciously carried in my hand into the key-hole, which necessitated the smashing of the lock when I was wanted for tea.

I fear there was something left out of my moral character when I was created, for not only was I never ashamed of myself in my boyhood for my love of dogs, though frequently and forcibly told I ought to be, but even now I prefer them to all other animals, and enjoy a quiet chat with any chance cur far more than I do with many of my two-legged acquaintances, and I plead guilty to encouraging my children to make friends with dogs of all descriptions, and they agree with me in thinking there is nothing so pleasant as going to the dogs.

Having developed this taste so early in life and spent so much of my time with my canine friends, I have been able to learn the entire dog language which, by the *bye, has this* advantage over the human, that it

is the same all over the world, and therefore I infer that dogs rendered no assistance at the attempt to construct the Tower of Babel. Few men thoroughly master this language, though many learn to understand what individual dogs have to say.

I need not tell my readers that the tongue helps but little in dog-talk, and that it is chiefly expressed by the tail, the ears, the eyes, the legs, and even the hairs on their bodies, and it is only to be thoroughly learnt by those who begin young, have a hearty love for dogs, and study them with patience, good temper and perseverance. But this knowledge only came to me in after years, and as yet I am writing of my early puppyhood, and when Hannah Wiseman and her brush closet ruled my life. Long before I arrived at that proud moment when I possessed a dog of my own, I associated with, and made friends of, various dogs in the back yard, besides some outsiders, such as the postman's dog, the dog at the farm, and the sedate little black cur that came round with the fishman.

Pincher and Crib, both of them bull terriers, were for a long time my dear friends, especially the latter.

Pincher was a fine old fellow, but as his one pleasure in life was to fight every other dog he saw, his company was not so amusing as Crib's, and one got rather tired of playing with him as he never for a moment took his attention off the kennel opposite, not even to have a lick at the numerous wounds he always had all over him. He had, however, become quite perfect in his favourite amusement and during all the time I knew him, he never once came off second best in the bloody battles he fought. Crib too was fond of a good

stand up fight, and had the true Englishman and bull-dog pluck. A pluck that made him always ready to begin a row, and quite blinded him to the fact that he had had a thrashing. Over and over again he had a turn up with Pincher, and to impartial observers got well licked, but he never owned it, and asserted and believed that if he had only been allowed to go on a little longer he would have made the old dog look small. Besides fighting he had many other amusements such as rat and rabbit catching, swimming, fetching and carrying, &c. He was a quick active dog, and I remember that one of his favourite exploits was, when out for a run with the donkey-cart, to jump in behind, bolt under the seat, over the foot board along the donkey's back, and away far over the poor old beast's head nearly scaring it into a fit in his progress. Like most creatures he had his faults, and one was a craving for the blood of fat Christmas turkeys, and have it he would whenever he saw the prosy, strutting, gobbling fools. And then he had such a love for taking a run through a game preserve. We could never teach him that game was tamed and taken care of in these woods for the pleasure of men, and that rushing through a mob of pheasants at feed scared them and did harm. For these two faults he was at last given away, and I trust as he grew older he grew wiser and gave up his troublesome tricks. Both Crib and Pincher were most friendly to children, and I have never known a bull terrier that was otherwise. There are many other dogs I prefer as companions, but for small children to play with, I know no dog so good tempered or that will stand so much teasing as a bull terrier.

Amongst my outside friends at this time I am proud to be able to claim old Master, a big, rough, wiry-coated, snow-white dog with a head showing his bull-dog descent and a tail about four inches long, that wagged in a slow deliberate manner when the owner was pleased, and became as rigid as a poker when he felt angry with man or beast.

He was a slow dignified dog, never given to play, and never in a hurry; even when following a carriage or horse he contrived by his trippling pace to appear to be going slowly, and if a mischievous boy shied a stone after him, as would sometimes happen, instead of bolting as his tormentor expected, he would halt and turn round, and it took more than an ordinarily plucky urchin to show a bold face in front of his quiet resolute look. He belonged to a gentleman who lived about a mile and a half from our house, and he first made friends with me whilst visiting us with his owner, and very soon he took to coming up alone to have a chat with me and a roll on the lawn, and would at first often extend his visits over a few days when properly and politely invited. I am sorry to say that whilst on one of these protracted visits my father insulted him by saying in an angry voice as he was hurrying out of the house and stumbled over Master. "Get out, you great slow beast, you are always in the way." Master behaved with great dignity, but he never forgot the rude speech, and no amount of civility or friendly pats from my father would make him wag his stump, and though he trotted up to call on me each morning, he never again slept under our roof. His dislike to my father was increased by his friendship for me, for on one occasion when I had got into some

scrape, Master saw my father turn me out of the drawing-room in a flood of tears. The old dog trotted by my side to the foot of the stairs where we both seated ourselves, and he joined me in a most dismal howl, and would not be comforted until I had been forgiven and was again laughing.

About this time, two most important events occurred which confirmed my love for dogs, and helped me to get such an insight into the character of these noble beasts, that I can never feel myself without a friend, while I can have one of them near me. The first of these events was the arrival one day of a small brown "Dandy Dinmont" terrier, who on being released from the hamper in which he had come, began to caper and play in a marvellous manner, and smelt in the most delicious way of young puppy. He was of a celebrated stock, the pick of the litter, and my big brother, to whom he belonged, prophesied such a glorious career for him, that I looked on him with great respect, and thought him the most valuable acquisition. The whole family went into committee to decide on the best name for him, for as my father said "there is a lot in a name," and the dog might be ruined by a bad one. After rejecting those suggested by my sisters, such as "Fido," "Pedro," "Faithful," and a lot of other soft ones with the proper contempt they merited, and also a few such as "Gripper" and "Tear 'em," as being too rough for so playful and good tempered a young dog, we finally settled on the old historic name of "Pepper," and from that day to this, it has been as much a family name with us all, as any owned by my brothers and sisters. Shortly after the arrival of Pepper, my big brother walked late one

evening into the drawing-room, and from the capacious inside pocket of his shooting coat pulled forth by its short tail, a small red and white puppy also of the Dandy species, who on being placed on the floor at once flew at my brother, and seemed impressed with the conviction that the whole duty of dog was to go in and worry never mind what. It was at once named "Wasp," and from that evening till I had to turn out of my home into the big world, these two dogs were part and parcel of my life, and were the jovial happy companions of all my young days.

The first night that "Wasp" arrived, after having a good supper, she was put to sleep in the wood-house through the back kitchen, and when the maids opened the door in the morning, out she popped, and seeing strangers, at them she went, and an hour later when my mother came expecting to see the breakfast ready, she found the morning's work not begun, and the maids all huddled together on the top of the kitchen table, and "that little warmint" dancing round and baying at them. My mother in her turn had to beat a hasty retreat, and it was not till my brother appeared on the scene that order was restored.

After breakfast the two puppies were introduced to one another, and, after a few fights, all of which ended, simply because the volatile Pepper could not keep in a bad temper long enough to go on with them, they became great friends, and my younger brother Bob and myself were told to take the puppies into the orchard and play with them. Wasp fell to my share, and for the first few hours I felt about as happy with her, as I should now if I were put to play with a leopard. Every time she looked at me my blood turned cold, and I expected

to be worried like a rat by the diminutive beast, and at last my arms ached so much from holding them over my head to keep my hands out of Wasp's reach, that I had to climb up an apple-tree to take a rest. We soon however got on good terms, and though Wasp never quite got over the notion that she was neglecting her duty when not worrying something, yet she turned out an honest good-tempered dog, especially with children, and was only to be equalled by Pepper as a boy's companion and friend.

Up to this time all my dog friends had been grown up, and though I had never experienced one unsatisfactory moment with them, yet they were poor fun compared to these puppies. The old dogs had ideas, pleasures and plans of their own, and I had to follow and be guided more or less by them; but here were two noble little beasts that would do just as I liked, and would play and run about with me till I was quite knocked up, and they themselves reduced to the last stage of exhaustion, and could hardly stand on their tottering legs with their red tongues lolling out, a wise sedate expression on their faces, and their tails curved down instead of upwards. Like young humans (and don't all dogs greatly resemble humans!) they went through stages of good and bad looks. When quite small, at the time I first saw them, they were round, plump and quite lovely. A few weeks later their tails got too long for their bodies, their necks too thin for their heads, and their stom—— well, bodies, far too big and round. Then at this stage how they would eat! When they began their meals they looked quite slim and stood up like men with their heads in their plates pegging away. Slowly and gradually their bodies

began to swell, their necks craned out, and they began to tip forward on their front legs, whilst their tails turned up stiffly over their backs in a way that made them look as if they were being lifted off their hind legs by them. When all the food was done (what a powerful swallow that last was) how they straddled their legs apart as they retired seemingly on tiptoe to take a nap! By the end of a year they were into their hobble-de-hoy-hood. Their legs now became too long for them, and flopped about as they galloped, especially the hind ones, which would not keep in a line with their bodies, but went sideways as if trying to get in front of the fore legs, their bodies got lean and their heads long, and everyone, except those well up in dogs, said they must turn out ugly beasts.

Then what young fools they were! never looking where they were going, and in consequence always coming to grief into a hole, or knocking their heads against a tree or a gate, after which they would walk with an extra old dog air, as much as to say "all that folly is done with, and I am now going to be a dog in earnest." Then no sooner had they determined on this reformation than off they would bolt, one after the other, till the leading puppy, whilst in full career, suddenly catches sight of the garden-roller which he takes for a lion or some other savage beast; he stops short, half in fright half in anger, and bang comes the pursuer over him upsetting each other, and producing such a panic that they both retire at a trot, stepping very high, and casting looks behind them, *first* on one side then on the other, up go the bristles *on their backs, and* the exertion they go through in

attempting to keep their tails from between their legs is quite superdogian. When at what they consider a safe distance from the roller they halt and bark, and are so frightened at the savage sound of their own voices that they make another hasty retreat. If left alone, they will bark at the roller for an hour, but if taken up to it, they will, directly they discover what it is, smile and fawn round it, and do their best to explain to "the good old fellow" that "they were not the least bit afraid of him."

CHAPTER II.

EDUCATION.—THE FIRST RAT.—JUVENILE COURAGE.—FETCHING AND CARRYING.—A SACRED CHARGE.—A NARROW ESCAPE.

ONE morning when the puppies were about eight months old, my elder brother called me, and said that he thought the time had arrived when it would do both the puppies and me good to be entered to vermin, and a few minutes later I was proudly jogging after him with a dirty bag on my back containing two ferrets, three or four good dogs at my heels, and Pepper and Wasp blundering along, now on this side, now on that, now under our feet, and then bullying and teasing their more business-like elders.

We had not far to go before we reached "the allotments," a field let out as such to the villagers by my father, in which were several small stacks and other tempting lodgments for rats. We drew all these blank, and then went on to a small pond in the middle of the field. One of the old dogs at once stood at a rat's hole under a small oak tree growing on the steep bank. My brother tied up all the old dogs at a little distance, and then told me to put the white ferret into the hole whilst he held the two puppies to look out for a bolt. Slowly the ferret dragged herself into the hole, and just as she was disappearing gave

a sharp wriggle to her tail that proved to my brother beyond a doubt that the old tenant was at home. All was still for a moment, then like a ball from a gun, pop went some brown object from the bank into the water. All was bustle and excitement at once. My brother ran round the pond, and in a few moments pointed out a monster rat swimming steadily to the shore. When it saw my brother, under it went again, and from the opposite bank we could see it swimming under the water. My brother turned up his sleeve, and slipping round to the spot the rat was approaching, knelt down, and just as it was about to land plunged his hand into the water, and secured it safely by the back of the neck. While this was going on I had caught the ferret, and tied it up in my bag, and the two puppies had gone nearly wild with excitement. The rat was carried to a good open spot and then turned down, and Pepper seeing it first made a dash forward, and after two or three attempts picked it up in his mouth, but dropped it again the next moment, having had his black nose split open by its sharp teeth. He evidently did not care to renew the attack, but sat down with a most doleful expression of countenance, and licked the red drops that fell on his paws. Wasp now came to the fore, and having run the rat to bay behind a big clod, rushed in and pinned it. In an instant the rat had her hard and fast by the eyebrow, but it had harder metal to contend with than in Pepper. There was no howl from her, but on the contrary, a savage snarl and with one or two good shakes she finished off the rat and then trotted about with it in her mouth with her tail stuck up, the picture of a proud conqueror.

"My word for it, Harry," cried my brother, "she is a clipper, there is no doubt about it; she is going to be one of the best dogs in the country. I am as pleased as if some one had given me half-a-crown."

Now I had never possessed more than sixpence in my life, so the mention of so vast a sum gave me quite a feeling of awe at the tremendous pleasure it must represent, and all the rest of the day I kept looking in my brother's face to make sure it was not getting too much for him.

Pepper soon got over the dolefuls, and joined Wasp in mouthing the dead rat, but as long as he lived he never forgot that bite, and though in after times he became a very useful "varmint" dog, he was always a *soft* one and preferred taking hold of a rabbit to a rat. From this day I often accompanied my brother on his excursions after rats, and thus my education and that of the puppies went on at the same time. Of the three Wasp proved the aptest scholar, and by the time she was fifteen months old she could speak to a rat in a hole, hunt a hedge quietly and steadily, and stand on three legs at a bolt hole for an hour. When once she got hold of a rat there was no escape for it, and she would kill a dozen as fast as they bolted without moving a foot.

Pepper and I had exactly the same faults. We never could keep still, or keep our attention fixed for more than a moment, and then we were both of us too keen and too impatient. When the ferret was put in and Pepper stationed to watch the bolt hole, nothing could be more perfect than the way he took up his stand, but before he had been there a minute he began to long to see how affairs were going on at the other

holes, and round his head would turn, and at that instant out would pop the rat, away would dash Pepper after it into the hedge, but failing to find it in his first plunge he would come out and race along the bank with a series of bounds to the far end of the field and then back again, thus again and again over-running his mark, and by his excitement leading all the other dogs wrong. Wasp on the contrary when she got a rat in a hedge would hunt quietly along till she smelt it, and then would follow up the scent till she drove it into another hole or picked it up in some thick tuft of grass. She never got excited and never lost her head for a moment. When Pepper was told to smell a hole to see if a rat were at home, he was all zeal, thrust his nose in up to his eyes, straddled his legs well apart, and then for five minutes would take such violent sniffs one feared his nostrils must burst. When he had thus pretended to be very knowing long enough, out would come his nose and he would begin scratching furiously and biting at the hole as much as to say, "I'll have him in a moment." In would go the ferret and out it would come again and Master Pepper would look up, and in an injured manner say, "Didn't I say so." No trust could be put in him, and yet he had such a jolly mischievous rollicking way with him it was quite impossible to be angry. Wasp when at the same work would just give one sniff at the hole, and if no one was at home would jog on, and it was quite needless to waste time by running the ferret through. If the rat were at home she would quietly draw back, give one wriggle to her short tail, and then begin to search for the bolt hole, where she would take up her stand at a little distance and become perfectly rigid till the rat

was well out, when her strike came like lightning and all was over.

Though Pepper was not perfect at vermin, he had various other accomplishments that made up for the deficiency. Long before he was out of his puppyhood he could fetch and carry, go back a mile on the road when told to look for a glove, though he had not seen it dropped, and if a ball was thrown into the thickest wood he would search till he found it. When he grew up he became most useful out shooting as he would retrieve dead game to perfection, and never let a wounded bird escape. Beside all this, he was a splendid swimmer, and was ever ready to plunge into water, even when it was partially covered with ice. If a stone were thrown in front of him whilst swimming, down would go his head and up would go his heels, and he would disappear and remain under water for half a minute, and if it were not very deep, he would fetch up the stone.

Before Bob and I were into our teens, my elder brother had to leave home to start in the world for himself, and though our sorrow at losing him was very acute, yet the charge he left us of the two dogs and a ferret was so gratifying to our young vanity, that child-like we soon got over our trouble, and devoted ourselves to our important duties. Hannah Wiseman made us a new ferret's bag, old Bacon the gardener (our special ally) made us a wallet or game-bag, wherein to carry dead rats and rabbits, and by dint of saving up our money for weeks, we were at last enabled to buy a small ratting spade, and thus were ready to open the great vermin war in a befitting manner. My dear mother for some (to us) unaccountable reason, seemed

somewhat ashamed of us, as she saw us start day after day on our excursions, and I fear the wear and tear to clothes, and general destruction of our wardrobes gave her a lot of trouble, but these things did not disturb us at that time, and we felt as proud as young soldiers when equipped for the first time, and going off to glory.

We had not started on our own account many days before my zeal and love for the sport nearly took me out of this world. All over the neighbourhood there were large and deep pits from which clay had been dug as dressing for the fields. Some of these old pits were dry, and filled with brushwood, and were grand places for the rabbits, whilst others were full of water, and their banks riddled with rats' holes. Half a mile from my home just inside a field down the lane, was one of these old ponds full of water, which from its great depth looked dark and forbidding. At the upper end grew a clump of old oaks, the gnarled and twisted limbs of which stretched far over and drooped into the still waters, making a perfect bower beneath which the water-hen and her brood would scuttle at the first sign of danger.

Altogether it was a weird, lonesome place, and needed not to enhance the awe in which we held it the popular village report, "that ghosteses were to be seen there at midnight," and that "in years gone by, even in the day-time, long bony arms had stretched out from the water, and dragged down venturesome boys whilst climbing on the overhanging boughs after "nesteses," and that their wails and cries for help might still be heard during stormy blustering nights.

Beyond these trees the side of the pond became quite perpendicular, and on the top was a thick hedge.

Some time before (it seemed an age ago to us) we had been cautioned against ever going into the field where the pond was; but no doubt, we thought, this caution had been forgotten by those in authority, and had been given when we were quite small boys, whereas we were now in our teens, and what harm could there be in going just to the side of the pond and letting the dogs have a hunt round? "Hi, Pepper, go on Wasp, get round, old lady, push them up." Soon there was a bustle in the bushes, and Pepper plunged into the water, after a water-hen, whilst Wasp wriggled through the grass and scrub after a huge rat, which, after a good hunt, she missed by its bolting into a hole on the top of the steep bank in the thick hedge. The hole must be a short one we decide, or she would not be so keen about it, and there can be no danger if we creep carefully round to lend her a helping hand. I was soon with Wasp, and finding, when I pushed a stick down the hole, that it ran in the direction of the pond, I carefully and cautiously took a peep over the bank to see if I could discover a bolt hole. To make it more safe, I took hold of a bough in each hand, and leant forward till I could almost see the face of the bank, when, oh horror! crack went the bough in my left hand, and I dived head foremost over the bank, but I clung on hard by the other hand, and so just saved myself from going head-first into the water. Oh dear, what awful terror I was in, as I hung suspended over the black abyss, and now my hands began to slip down the bough, and just as Bob's pale face appeared over the bank above me, crash went my last hope, and splash I fell into the pond. At first I felt the bottom for a moment with my feet, but the sides were so steep,

that I could not keep my footing, and not being able at that time to swim a stroke, I gradually sank, and as

A NARROW ESCAPE.

each inch went under water I got further from shore. I shall never forget the awful rushing sound as the waters closed over me, or the frantic struggles I made to get

out, but they were all in vain, and down, down, I went to the bottom, and my struggles ceased.

Fortunately for me, and for my readers if they have any interest in what is to follow in these pages, drowning men come to the surface once or twice after their struggling is over, and before life is extinct. Then again it was fortunate that Bob, though very young was very plucky, for by the time I came floating to the top he had plunged down the bank by the nearest old oak, and, clinging to its drooping branches, and up to his waist in water, managed just to clutch my clothes and drag me to the bank. It was some minutes after I was safe on land ere I became conscious, and then the pain and misery I suffered, was I am sure sufficient punishment for all my wickedness. I was powerfully sick, bitterly cold, wet through, and covered with green water-weeds. The worst part of all was still before me, and do what I would, home I must go, and there could be no escape from the row and punishment that would follow. The only ray of comfort was that my father was away from home, and would not return for a week, by which time the fearful freshness of my escapade would be over, and perhaps my punishment. We put the best face we could on it, told the truth, were sent to bed for the rest of the day, and were forbidden to unchain our two dogs again until my father returned. All was over, and before we went to sleep that night we were forgiven and happy once more.

CHAPTER III.

VILLAGE COMPANIONS.—A READY TONGUE.—THE OLD BUCK.—A STAND UP FIGHT.—A NIGHT OF SORROW.—A MORNING OF JOY.—A HAPPY MOTHER.—AN INDIFFERENT FATHER.—NEW FERRETS.—DOGS IN HARNESS.

As our home was far from any town, and the vices of town boys had not reached our village urchins, my father rather shut his eyes to our making friends of the lads, and besides helping us in our games, they would, when not at work or school, often join us in ratting and rabbiting excursions, and the old squire being now dead and his successor not given to game and game-keepers, we had permission from the farmers to kill rats and rabbits all over the parish, and we soon became celebrated for our two clever dogs.

Foremost among these village boys was Eddy Frost, the washerwoman's grandson. Why we specially took to him I don't exactly know, unless it was that he was the nearest and easiest got at. He was a fat, round-faced, stolid lad, with a permanent complexion like the ruddy side of a ribstone pippin, slow in his movements and more given to letting his mind rest than exercising it with his tongue. In all respects except this last he "favoured" his grandmother, but she never allowed her tongue to rest quiet for a

moment, and would talk in a high key from sunrise to sunset, and as far as we boys were concerned, to some purpose, for if we chanced to kill a rabbit or have an extra penny in our pockets, she would soon talk the one into her pantry and the other into the old teapot in the front kitchen.

"Grandmother," Eddy would say, "the young gentlemen want me to go along of them a-ratting."

"Lor' bless your heart alive! Go?—no that you sha'n't, and you not had the lessest mite of dinner, and how should you, seeing as how there ain't none for you. I moil and I toil but I can't find food for all, and if I let you go, you would be that hungry 'gainst you came back there would be no stowing your blessed stomach. Thank you kindly, Master Hennery, but it fare contrarywise to my duty to the poor orphan, which his dear mother left to me and who his father never gives a penny towards his wittles. What! is that ere your Pepper dawg? Lor' surely, how he du improve! He sartainly is the greatest beauty I ever did set my eyes on. Well, if you be a-going past the house and could just give the boy a crust or a bit of cold meat to stay his stomach, I won't say you no, and if you should happen on a rabbit, I reckons as how you will remember me, and think of the trouble I have to find wittles enough to keep the boy healthy like. Lor' bless you, though he *du* look a fine healthy jolly fellar, when he's strip't he's as thin as a hurdle!"

I don't remember that Eddy himself ever sponged on us, but I do remember that when he was stripped, as I often saw him whilst bathing with us, that he was as plump as a partridge, and that it was a caution to see the way he could clear "a plate of wittles" at the

shortest notice. I know that Bob and I had a theory that his grandmother fed him in the night if we had not in the day: by which arrangement he might always have room to stow away a good stock of food if occasion offered. I hope his food did him good, and I know he often repaid us for it by giving us a hint where there was a good old stub rabbit on the farm where his grandfather worked, and when a ferret "laid up" he was a good hand at digging it out, and would work away for us for hours.

Besides Eddy Frost we had Godfrey Goward, Billy Pettet and one or two more, all deadly enemies to rats and firm believers in Pepper and Wasp. Now that I am able to look back with impartial eyes, I think my father was right in letting us mix with these boys, for if we did now and then hear a rough expression, there was not very much harm in it, and on the other hand they put us up to many useful country ways, and taught us to be independent, and to take care of ourselves by flood and field.

As I have already said when my brother left home he gave us charge of the two dogs and a ferret. This last was familiarly known as "the old buck," and we at that time fondly believed and used to boast, that there was not such another ferret within the boundaries of the county, and we were quite ready to back this belief, for Billy Pettet, provoked by the beast standing shivering with its nose just out of a rat's hole for half an hour and refusing to "come to hand" so far forgot himself as to call it "a peeping good for nothing warmint." In a moment I stripped off my jacket, tucked up my sleeves, felt my biceps, spit on my hands, and hit him on the nose, and so began a

fight that might have lasted hours (for we did no great damage) if the procrastinating old buck had not taken advantage of our being thus engaged, to slip out of the hole and make off down the hedge at a gallop. Fortunately we espied him quite at the other side of the field, so shut up the battle and scampered after him. Firmly as we believed in the old buck in those days, I am now inclined to think Billy Pettet was right, and that he was good for nothing. I have a lively recollection of standing in sundry ditches over my boots in water and perished with cold, making a chirping noise with my lips supposed to represent the squeak of a rat in extremis, in the fond hope that the old buck would be tempted to come out of the warm rat's bed where he was coiled up fast asleep, to see what it was, and then in the end having to dig him out.

We had never as yet left him out all night, when one dull cold drizzling autumn afternoon we were induced to turn him into a stack that was placed at the end of an old wooden barn which was full of straw, broken farm implements, and old carts. It was altogether too big a country for us, and even if the buck did not "lay up," he might wander off in half a dozen directions without being seen. Anyhow from the moment his tail disappeared down the hole we never set eyes on him again, and after roaming round and round the buildings till it was quite dark, we gave it up as a hopeless job and plodded home with hearts like lead, and the light, empty, dirty old bag in our hands to remind us of our loss.

Childhood's troubles are supposed to be light, and so they may be compared with those that come in after

life, but I am sure whilst fresh this was almost more than I could battle against, and I remember crying myself to sleep that night with the feeling that all happiness was over, and that life in future must be a dreary blank with no joy or pleasure in it. Had anyone told me that before breakfast time next morning, I should be rejoicing over a new acquisition and feeling myself to be the happiest boy within miles, I should have scoffed at the absurd assertion, but such was the fact.

As soon as I was dressed I ran out to the back yard to ask old Bacon if he had heard anything of the missing ferret, and when he had destroyed my last hopes by saying, "No, sir, I was all round the place at daybreak, and there warn't the lessest sign on him. You may depend on it you'll never see him no more," he continued, "troubles never come alone, and now there is summat amiss with Wasp. I've put her under the manger in the stable, poor rogue—she's done a nice mornin's work."

In a moment I was in the stable, and there lay poor Wasp curled up in a ball, and, oh horrors, she never moved and only slightly wagged her tail when I called her name! I was soon on my knees at her side, and lifting her up in my arms discovered the cause of her queer behaviour. There in her warm round bed struggled and squealed a diminutive puppy, hard at work sucking its little pink tongue, the end of which peeped out from between its lips. Here was joy! Joy for a king, and I really don't know who was the most pleased and proud—Wasp or I. I rushed into the house and told everyone. I stopped the cook preparing breakfast to make her forage in the larder for

tit-bits for Wasp, and when she had eaten a little, I remembered Pepper and ran to fetch him to see his little son. I was greatly disgusted by his conduct, for instead of being overcome with joy as I had expected, he only cast an eye on it sideways, gave a sniff to make sure it was not vermin, and then trotted off to have a bark at the old sow in the pig-yard.

I fear I gave but little attention to my lessons that morning, and I know I sat under the manger with Wasp all the afternoon, and every spare minute I had for days after, and that I took every creature that came to the house, from the archdeacon to the fishman, to see my treasure, and that the fishman cut out the archdeacon by the aptness of his remarks, and thus gained my esteem and respect. Those of the archdeacon seemed to me mild and feeble, and from that day I looked on him as a poor creature, and even now I have not quite got over that feeling.

Since the day I lost "the old buck" I have often been in trouble and had losses, but have invariably found that some kind friend would come forward and lend a helping hand in the hour of need, and I am sure that the man or boy who has not found it so has himself to blame and not the world. A helping hand was soon stretched out to us, and in that hand was a present of a fine lively young ferret, white with pink eyes. At first it was rather given to eating the ends of our fingers, but it soon got over this amusement, and reserved its teeth for rats and rabbits. And now by persuading our mother to make us an advance on our weekly pocket money, we managed to raise three and sixpence, and with this we bought from Billy Joy the ratcatcher a small dark brown ferret that turned out the very best

I ever possessed, and as Billy Joy threw in with the ferret the information that the reason our old one "laid up" and would not come to hand, was that he was overfed, fat and lazy, we avoided this in future, and the result was that our ferrets were as quick as lightning and would face a perfect army of rats.

As soon as Wasp was "about again" we reopened the campaign, and hardly a day passed without a slaughter of rats.

When we were boys there was a race of dogs in England which I am sorry to say has almost entirely disappeared. It has disappeared because their employment is, wisely or unwisely I will not say, done away with. I mean the sturdy mongrel, one mass of intelligence and pluck, that used to drag carts about for the hawkers.

A great outcry was raised by some kind people against the cruelty of working dogs, and these being backed by those whose horses shied at the small carts as they whisked by (and there were few horses that did not do so) an act was passed which made it an offence for any one in England to make a dog drag a cart. No doubt some of these poor dogs were over-worked, and there was much cruelty, but at the same time there were some powerful arguments on the other side. If animals were not to be worked because some were abused, how about the horse? Was not the cart-dog a great help to a large number of industrious poor men and women, and then is not the dog the only animal that takes a delight in working for and being useful to man! In my opinion the abuse, and not the use, of the animal might have been, at any rate at first, put a stop to, but this was not to be, and to the joy of the

game preserving country Squire, who believed that each and every one of these dogs were kept solely to kill his darlings, they have been put down. I had some great friends amongst these dogs, and there was not one that ran on our road I did not know the name of, and I often held conversations such as the following with their owners.

"Don't you think it is rather hard lines working those poor beasts?"

"No, I don't, now just you look at them dawgs—do they look thin, do they look as how they minded it? Which do you think has the best time of it, the Squire's yard-dog over there or mine? To my sartin knowledge the Squire's dawg has been tied up at that great kennel since he was a pup, half frozen in winter and nearly roasted in summer. I don't say as how he don't get his wittles, but I do know that the poor rogue often has only filthy dusty water to drink, and for years he has never been let out for a run. Then just look at his collar and chain, they are enough for a horse to carry, and their weight has made his front legs bend out like rainbows. Now I don't deny these here dawgs work hard, so do I, but they gets well fed and cared for, it wouldn't pay me to do contrarywise. Then they are allus along of me and see a lot of company and life, and there, I really believe if I told them they had to swap lives with the old dawg yonder, they would just go and hang themselves. What? you don't think this'un looks werry happy! Well I can't say he is so werry wrapped up in it, but that 'ere dawg, if you'll believe me, properly hates a Sunday, 'cos why? he ain't a dragging, and often and often I've seen him slip his head through the collar and just trot the cart round the yard for re-

creation. Now, sir, mayn't I sell you a pair of garters or braces? Well good day, off you go, you two," and with a few sharp barks, off they would start down the hill at the rate of eight or ten miles an hour, with the man sitting sideways on the cart with his legs poked out over the road. These dogs were nearly all of them

DOGS IN HARNESS.

crosses between the sheep dog and the bull dog and though mongrels, were some of them very handsome. They furnished yard-dogs for every farmhouse in the country, and woe betide the tramp or loafer that tempted by the lonely position of some secluded homestead, and the presence of only women about, dared to attempt a robbery. The maid would slip round to the backyard and unchain Boxer, and if the robber did not get well worried he had probably to stand with his back to a wall till the master or a policeman could be fetched.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST VISIT.—IMPALED ON A RAT-SPADE.—COLLECTING EGGS.—THE FIRST NESTS.—ROBBING A CHURCH.—NESTING.

WHILST still not into our teens, an old friend of our father's asked Bob and me to stay with him, and the invitation included the two dogs and the ferrets. Our host was the Rector of a parish some ten miles away, but he farmed a considerable amount of land of his own, the soil of which was light and sandy.

By the help of his coachman Bob and I spent each day rabbiting and ratting, and as these noble creatures swarmed all over the place, we had a lot of grand sport, and I shall always look back to that, my first visit from home, as one of the bright spots in my boyhood. I fear, however, our host and hostess do not remember our visit with so much pleasure!

Their children were quite little things, and the genus Boy was an animal only slightly known by them. From the moment we put our feet inside their house, I believe their happiness was gone, and they lived in a perfect fever of dread, which was increased after the first day's ratting by Thomas informing his master that we were "outdacious young'uns, and it would be a mussy if there warn't a crowner's inquest in the house afore we

left." And there very nearly was an inquest brought to pass in this way:

I have before mentioned our ratting spade—a short heavy weapon, with a small spoon-shaped spade at one end, and a sharp steel point at the other, used for pricking into the earth to find which way the holes went. Bob was carrying this spade one day, when a nice lively young rabbit started from under his feet and bolted through the hedge.

Bob threw the spade over, and then, taking a run, leaped after it.

Now the spade by accident had stuck in the ground, leaving the sharp end pointing up in the air. Bob, in his hurry and excitement, never thought of this, and so came down on the top of the spade, which taking him fortunately on one side, ripped up his skin to the depth of half an inch, and four inches long. He did not say much, but he looked anything but happy, and no sooner did Thomas see how much damage was done than he exclaimed, "I expected summat, come you along to missis. Lawk a lawk, what a mussy it didn't penetrate; if it had, it must have come out of your mouth."

Both Bob and I were considerably astonished at the fuss that was made, and its being thought necessary to plaster up the place, and for Bob to keep his bed for the rest of the day. We were never asked to repeat our visit, and I have since been told that the announcement of our deaths by some shocking accident was daily expected for years!

Ratting and rabbiting were looked upon by us boys as quite a serious business, never to be neglected, and to which all other sports and amusements should give

way. Yet there were times in Spring and Summer, when, owing to the grass and herbage being long, it was difficult for us to do much, and at such times we amused ourselves with birds'-nesting, fishing, bathing, cricket, and many other things.

At a very early age we started an egg-collection, which proved an endless amusement, for by the time the birds began to build, all the eggs we had collected the previous season had succumbed to various accidents, and we had the excitement of beginning all over again.

I fear we must have given some very unhappy moments to the great game-preservers near us, for we poked our noses into every plantation and hedgerow for miles round, and though we only took three or four pheasant and partridges' eggs each year for the collection, yet we often trod so near one of these nests that "burr" would go the old bird, scattering the eggs far and wide and bringing our hearts into our mouths, first from the start she gave us, and then from dread of the row we should get into if the keepers caught us. Before the last patches of snow had disappeared from the shady side of the hedges, and whilst a few early violets were a rarity only to be found in some favoured warm spot, we began to peep and peer about in the hope of discovering a nest, and now and then on the face of an old bank, snugly placed behind a stump, we would find a black-bird's nest just begun, and soon there would be quite a path up to it made by our frequent visits of inspection.

The wood-stack was sooner or later a sure find for a hedge-sparrow's nest with its pretty little blue eggs; and year after year while yet the east wind brought

the breath of Jack Frost with it, and made us tuck our fingers inside our jackets, we found a robin's nest in the ivy creeping up the wall at the back of the stables. But these were early days and not to be compared to the glorious ones to come; days when the sun poured down soft and warm, and the green leaves came out with a rush: when the banks and hedgerows were carpeted with violets and primroses, and every species of bird was bustling about: the hens full of care and anxiety, and the cocks vying with each other in pouring forth their love-songs. At such times nesting began in earnest, and when we had exhausted the hedges and ditch sides near home, or rather thought we had done so, for really there was no end to finding nests, we made distant excursions to the great rabbit warrens, covered with sweet yet faint smelling gorse, and there plundered the linnet and furzechat, and now and then dug out from an old rabbit's hole the nest of a rock dove with its two pure white eggs. At other times we made raids on a gentleman's park, where the old pollard oaks, full of holes and crannies, offered tempting nesting places for the owls and starlings, the swift and nut-hatch, and the fun of finding the nests was enhanced by the excitement of many a dangerous climb.

We often looked with longing eyes at the old church tower, and we felt quite sure that if we could only get up inside, we should reap a rich harvest of starlings' and sparrows' nests, but the old clerk who kept the keys when appealed to said, "I ain't a-going to have you boys a-messing about in the church, and perhaps breaking your necks and legs a-getting up the long ladder, and so I tell you." We consulted Eddy Frost

and Billy Pettet, and they told us that once, when the church was undergoing repairs, a boy had slipped up the tower, and in half-an-hour had come down with a hat full of eggs, all "wonderful cou-rus ones." Something must be done, so we got up one morning at daybreak when all was quiet, and took a good look

ROBBING A CHURCH,

round the church. At first it appeared quite impossible to get inside, and we were about giving it up as a bad job, but on Billy Pettet pitching a stone on to the top of the tower and frightening out a hundred birds, we were incited to fresh exertions. On looking round the church we found that one of the windows was made to

open, but that the fastening was on the inside, and that the only hope of getting at it was either to break a pane of glass or to take one out. Then the window was too high up to reach, but we were not going easily to give it up. I therefore mounted on Billy Pettet's shoulders, and, taking an old blunt knife in my hand, succeeded in turning up the soft lead all round a pane of glass, and with a shove at the low side tipping it out of the frame. In a moment the window was open, and in the next we had squeezed ourselves through, and were inside the church! Twice every Sunday for years I had been there, and I was familiar with everything inside, and had looked on all, from the poppy-heads on the ends of the seats to the young person leaning with her head over a basin on the red and green monument as if she had been suddenly taken poorly, as friends and acquaintances. It had never occurred to me that they were things to be afraid of; but *now* they all looked different: the poppy-heads scowled, the young woman looked severe, and even the pulpit and reading desk had a threatening aspect about them, and if we had only stood still for a moment, our forage would have come to an end and we should have beaten a hasty retreat. "Forward!" was the word, and we all three rushed to the tall and slender ladder that reached up to the trap-door leading into the tower. I went first, and putting my head against the door, shoved it up, and as I did so was nearly blinded by the dust that had accumulated on the top of it for years, and which poured down upon my head. A little dirt was nothing, an unknown and mysterious region was before us, so on we went and soon found ourselves in amongst the bells, with innumerable birds popping out of holes in the walls on every side. At it we went,

and for the next hour we collected eggs as fast as we could take them out of the holes. We filled two caps, and then with these in our teeth, quietly slipped down the ladder into the church and out of the window. The little pane of glass was replaced, the lead smoothed down, and from that day to this the old clerk has never discovered how the belfry trap-door came to be open and all that mess in the church. He did not make much fuss about it for fear the parson should accuse him of leaving the church keys about, so he swept up the dirt, shut the trap-door, and contented himself with saying all the Amens *at* me in a pointed manner on the next Sunday. The poppy-heads and the young woman on the top of the monument looked at me in a reproachful manner for a few Sundays, but they soon forgot it, and the only things that now remember our exploit are the four gargoyles on the church tower, who to this day seem to say, directly they see me, "There's the fellow who broke into the church!" It is twenty-eight years since I did this wicked thing, yet the strip of lead round that little pane of glass still shows the mark of my knife, and as I walked past it with my boys the other day, on my way into the church, I saw it plainly, and at once determined to give my young ones a lecture on the sin of not treating a church with reverence, and on the superiority of boys of my day to the degraded youth of this!

I can hear my readers, and especially the clerks and parsons saying, "Well, you were a bad lot," and I won't deny the accusation. I tell of myself as I was, and take the old well-used comfort, "boys will be boys." Others, especially the ladies, will say, "but how cruel you were to take the poor birds' nests." Again I won't deny the

charge, but comfort myself in the old way by saying, "not so cruel as your husbands and brothers, when for their amusement they walk into a wood and kill or maim dozens of tame hares and pheasants, or put a poor frightened pigeon in a trap to shoot it; and this with you, dear tender hearted creatures! looking on, and amusing yourselves by betting on the life of the poor bird." The world, I am sorry to say, is full of wanton cruelty, but here in England we think more and more, year by year, of the great sin of it, and I believe and hope it is getting less and less. We boys were cruel I have no doubt, but not wantonly, and I can remember how we often took great trouble and suffered pain ourselves to save some poor beast from doing so. A boy that for the fun of it is cruel to an animal will prove a cruel man, and should be avoided and detested by his fellows, especially by women and children. He will be a coward with men, and cringe and fawn on those he fears, but to his wife and children and those who cannot resist he will always be a bully and a tyrant.

Entire days were spent searching along the river bank for the eggs of the water-hen and the nest of the reed-warbler. On these occasions we took our dinner with us and added to the amusement of nesting that of bathing and wading, and it not unfrequently happened that we finished up by one, or both, of us falling into some hole and getting wet through all over. We looked on the eggs of the water-hen as great prizes, and so did our mother, for when cooked they are quite as good as plovers' eggs, and so helped out the dinner. It is rare to find the nest in a get-at-able place, so we had to bring art to our assistance in getting them. We would

cut a long willow pole with three forks at the end, and then drawing the points of our knives down the pole from these forks, strip up the bark and twist it backwards and forwards between the forks till we had made a gigantic spoon with which we could scoop the eggs out of the nests, even if placed in the middle of a pond. I don't know how it is, unless birds have given up building; but somehow there do not seem to be half the nests and eggs there used to be in our boyish days. Why, in those days if you did not go a-nesting the nests came to you! If you felt tired and oppressed by the heat, and went and lay down under the trees, either you espied some such nest as that of the greenfinch, the chaffinch, or the golden-crested wren, directly over you, or "tweet," "tweet," would go a little warbler all round you, and on peering about in the grass at your side, you would discover its nest, like a small oven, on the ground, full of tiny little white eggs with pink spots. The flycatcher had a nest in the honeysuckle at the front door, and a tomtit built in the hole by the side of the bell-handle! I do find a few nests now and then, but birds seem to have given up making building such a business, and boys no longer look on birds' nesting as their one object in life.

CHAPTER V.

LEARNING TO SWIM. — NEARLY DROWNED. — OUR FOREFATHERS' CREED. — A BED OF NETTLES. — FISHING. — STICKLE-BACKS. — WONDERS OF THE DEEP. — A TWENTY-POUND PIKE. — THE WHITE BULL. — SALTED DOWN FOR THE NAVY.

UNTIL we could swim a quarter of a mile we were (very properly) not allowed to bathe in the river alone, and I fear if we had not discovered a small pond near home, where the water was not more than three feet deep in any part, we should never have learnt to swim, for our elders were not as keen about it as we were; and it was not often that we could persuade them to take a hot and dusty walk for our instruction and amusement. The pleasure for us boys was somewhat doubtful, for my father, believing that the best way to teach a boy to swim was to chuck him into deep water, and not fish him out till he was half drowned, used to serve us so; and though we longed for a bathe whilst far away, yet when stripped and waiting to be pitched into the steel-black looking water, our courage slipped away, and I can remember on one occasion giving such a piercing scream, when I found myself flying through the air, that a policeman on the road half a mile off heard me, and came running down to see what was the matter.

Another time, my father, who was fishing, pointed out a hole in the river where he had a short time before stood with the water only up to his middle, and told me I might have a bathe there. I soon undressed, and taking a header found, on coming to the top, that my legs would not reach the bottom. I struggled and shouted, but as my father had walked some way further down the river he did not at first hear the row, and when he did and came running to the side of the hole, he espied me stretched out quite quiet on the sandy bottom. In a moment, without stopping to take off his clothes, he was in the water, and had me in his arms, and well it was he did so, for when I was placed on the bank I was quite insensible, and did not "come round" for some minutes. The fact was, as often happens, the sand at the bottom of the river had shifted, and what was, a few days before, a shallow spot was now a deep hole.

A very few days after we were allowed to kick about alone in the little pond, we began to get our legs to the top and swim a few strokes, and before the end of the summer we had accomplished our quarter of a mile, and were supposed to be able to take care of ourselves. Whatever advantage we derived from this pond by learning to swim was, I am sure, counterbalanced by our complexions being utterly spoilt by the beastly muddy state of the water. When first we went in it was pretty clear, but the bottom of the pond being all soft mud we soon stirred it up till the water was as thick as pea-soup, and I have seen the poor fish turn up on the top unable to endure it. We were greatly helped in learning to swim by using an old rush horse-collar, which, placed under us, put us in the proper

position whilst we learned to strike out. When once you can swim there is great satisfaction in taking a good header; but that it is necessary for health to plunge in head foremost, or even to put your head under water when you are in, I utterly deny; on the contrary, if a bather who wets his head when he goes into the water will leave off doing so, I answer for it he will escape having a headache. Were it necessary for health, Nature would teach water-rats, dogs, and other animals to wet their heads, whereas she teaches them to keep them as dry as possible. No; it is one of the ten thousand things our grandfathers taught us were good for us, simply because they were disagreeable! What can be more wretched, especially for ladies, than to walk out of a bathing machine, and then plunge one's head into a decoction of fine sand and water in about equal proportions? It is misery at the time, and a source of discomfort all day, for the hair remains dank and sticky, and full of sand. Go and sit opposite a row of bathing machines, and listen to what Nature tells you in the squalls of the poor little wretches who are taken in "for a dip!" Think of what I have just told you, and if it does not prove to you that often young ones know better than the old ones, you are hard indeed to convince. It appears to me that our grandfathers and grandmothers carefully studied the lessons Nature taught them, *not* to follow but to disobey them, especially where children were concerned. I remember that my torments from this began directly I woke of a morning. By the side of my bed stood a loathsome bath of *cold* water, into which I was at once plunged, and then (not half properly washed) dragged out and rubbed dry with a *rough* towel. I hated the bath, I

hated the towel, and I only wonder I did *not* hate the people who inflicted these tortures. I know of no animal but a Polar bear that would like being taken from a warm bed and treated in such a manner.

If in the course of the day I felt cold, I was told *not* to go near the fire. If I played about till I was hot and thirsty, I was told *not* to drink till I was cool, and did not want it! If I got tired and wanted rest, I was made to sit bolt upright in a chair so constructed that it was torture. When longing for a soft bed, I was put on a mattress as hard as a board. I longed for sugar (that all necessary food for young life), and therefore was not allowed it. I hated most sorts of physic, and therefore I had it daily till my constitution was destroyed. When I wanted to play, I was told to sit still and keep quiet; and when I wished for rest and quiet, I was told to go and play. If I rebelled against any of these tortures, I was asked what my grandfather would think of me? An inquiry I never cared to answer, but contented myself with what I thought of him! I am glad to say, for the sake of the little ones, we are wiser now and leave matters we do not understand to Dame Nature: the result is, our young ones extract all the pleasure there is to be had in life, are healthier than we were, and do not look on us as their natural tormentors. I shall be told that the above treatment raised a fine manly race, and that we are drifting into effeminacy. I answer this by saying, I believe only the very strong and hardy ones survived; and as for growing effeminate, look at the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race! look at our cricket grounds, hunting fields, and *volunteer* camps! Was it in our grandfathers' days that a man swam from England to

France? Well—poor old fellows, I will let you off—I see you have no answer to this, and I have no doubt if you had your time over again you would not make such mistakes.

When we were strong enough to swim alone our favourite bathing-place was about a mile and a half from the house, in a meadow where the main river was joined by a beck, at the mouth of which was a hole under a steep bank, gradually getting shallower till we could stand on the sandy bottom just up to our knees in water. There was a grand old oak tree under which we undressed, and on which we hung our clothes. On the other side of the river, directly over the hole, was an old alder leaning so much that we could walk up the bole and take a header from ten feet above the water. We often spent the entire afternoon here, now in the water, now racing up the meadow on the soft velvety grass, and then taking desperate and impossible jumps at the beck, only to fall head foremost into the water. The bathing hole was in a quiet and retired spot, and in a general way we ran no risk of shocking any one by this Adam and Eve way of passing our time; but on one occasion a party of people, ladies and gentlemen, came up the river in a boat to fish, and settled to begin in our bathing hole! We saw them just rounding the point as we sat drying ourselves in the sun, and in our fright we made a dash at the first object we saw big enough to hide our nakedness; this proved unluckily to be a bed of nettles! and I shall never forget the tortures we endured as we lay concealed, not only stung by the nettles, but by thousands of flies that took advantage of our having to keep quite still to have a good feast

on our poor hides. To make matters worse, after we had borne our tortures for what seemed to us *hours*, we heard the paterfamilias of the party say, "Move on! why we have only just wetted our lines! There is nothing like patience for catching fish, we will stop here another half hour." He was welcome to stop as long as he liked, but *we* were tired of it, so, after a whisper together, up we both started, made a rush full in sight, and plunged into the river within a few feet of the boat. I believe the ladies thought we were some sort of wild savages, for they set up piercing screams, and if the gentlemen had not been very active they would have upset the boat and joined us in the water. We got roundly abused, but it soon ended in their moving further up the river, and we were able to come out and put on our clothes, thus hiding our burning, stinging, plum-pudding-like bodies.

A few pages back I mentioned the pond down the lane, the pond where I so nearly came to an untimely end—well, in this pond I have often enjoyed an afternoon's fishing more than I have ever done since, though I have whipped half the rivers in England and many others over the seas. It was here I first wetted my line (whetting also my taste for angling) under the skilful management of my father, who was one of the most successful followers of the great Izaak I ever saw. Yes! not only did I wet my line, but at the first cast I caught a splendid fish! and before I left off I had safely landed twenty brace of beauties, many of them half an inch long! They were called "stickle-backs" from two "stickles" or pricks that stick out of their *backs*, and, if the captor is not careful, into his fingers. *The great advantage* of this sport is, that the tackle

is not either costly or extensive. A short stick, a short piece of string with a small worm tied on the end, is all that is wanted! Drop the worm into the water, keeping it in sight, and if there are any stickle-backs in the pond they will be at it in a moment, and will fight for the honour of being pulled out of the water. They swallow the end of the worm, and when it is well down their throats they can easily be hauled to land and put into the fish kettle. Another great advantage in stickle-back fishing is, that even after an extraordinary day's sport you can carry your fish home yourself! Well! you may laugh at all this, but, as I said before, I never enjoyed fishing more than I did that first day, and if I ever get to the side of that dear old pond again, with a piece of string in my pocket, I will kick up a worm and try my luck once more.

Besides the sport of catching these monsters of the deep, it is most interesting to watch their habits. They actually build nests and deposit the roe in them, and whilst it is being hatched, the old fish keeps in ambush under a water plant near at hand, and if another fish approaches out it pops and chases it away. They vary greatly in size and colour, and the most savage ones are always gorgeous in dress, Royal Guards I suppose, and in the uniform of that splendid corps! As the poor little, kicking, fighting things were far too small for cooking, we used to put them in our fish kettle, as we caught them, and carry them to a small brook near, where they soon increased and multiplied.

There were other delightful things to watch as we sat fishing for stickle-backs. There, under that tuft of *reed close to the* water, on a small platform he has

constructed, sits a venerable looking old water rat alternately chewing the cud, or washing and stroking his face with those hands of his, which, to the smallest detail, are exactly like those of some beautiful girl. He takes little notice of us, but if we disturb him, he trots off down the gallery he has made close to the edge of the pond; if hard pressed goes pop into the water, and may be seen far under it making for the opposite bank, and looking like a ball of silver. Then on the top of the water is a school of small insects that look like little bits of quicksilver, and are never still for a moment, but keep up a constant dance without figure and without finish, and, apparently, without purpose. Then what a lot of beetles and other curious insects; to say nothing of the numberless water efts with their flat thin tails and quaint forms and colours, coming to the top of the water for a mouthful of fresh air, and which only require putting under a gigantic magnifying glass to be converted into the great creatures that inhabited the earth before—well, before you and I can remember! Ah! times were good in those boyish days; and when one was tired out with running, tired of catching stickle-backs and felt lazy, as even boys will at times, it was good to loll on the edge of the pond in the shade of the old oak, and watch the marvellous and numerous inhabitants of the water and speculate on their ways and natures, until Wasp and Pepper, tired of swimming after the numerous water hens, came and shook themselves close to our faces, covering us with a muddy, strongly doggy smelling spray, and so broke up our meditations, and gave us fresh energy for some other boyish amusement.

Often, when the morning lessons were over, our

father would take us with him down to the river, and then for hours we would stroll along the bank with various success in catching such fish as perch, roach, dace, and now and then on rare occasions, a fine silvery eel, that invariably twisted and knotted up our line, and swallowed the hook somewhere down to about

WASP AND PEPPER.

his middle. Then later on, when the heat of summer was over, even when the meadows were covered with frost and snow, we took our rods and a kettle of dead bait, and trolled for jack; and though we did not catch many, and those nearly all small ones, we were borne up by the hope of one day catching the "twenty pounder" that was supposed to live in the hole just at the corner of the osier bed; I say, "supposed," for though I firmly believed in him then, and not only believed in him, but held him somewhat in awe, I am now convinced that he existed solely in our imagination, and was created by the fertile brain of the miller's

man to astonish our small minds. Pike-fishing was looked upon by us as much the finest sport, and so it may have been; but looking back from this distance of time, I am sure the greatest amount of pleasure was derived on those hot, sultry, summer afternoons, when all creation seemed in repose, when even the great gauzy-winged big-eyed dragon flies were glad to settle and rest on the broad spreading leaves of the water-lilies, and the cattle standing up to their knees in the river had hardly sufficient energy to swing their tails and flap their ears at the flies, as they chewed the cud, and gazed in a listless manner at the mob of colts all standing huddled together, head to tail, beneath the beech trees on the edge of the stream. How delicious it was, at such times, to sit on the grassy bank amidst the numerous sweet-smelling meadow and water plants, lazily moving one naked foot in the lukewarm water, and sleepily watch the gaudy float as it bobbed on the top of the stream, while Pepper and Wasp, tired out with scratching at the numerous rats' holes at the roots of the old trees, lay stretched out fast asleep by our side. In after years, when thousands of miles away and midst far different scenes, the smell of some of the old familiar meadow flowers has come across me, and in a moment I have been back on the river bank beneath the beech trees, with the sleepy hum of the insects, the ripple of the brook, and the distant "Hold ye" of the harvesters sounding in my ears, and I have then realized the happiness of those days, and regretted that they could never come again. True, I may sit by the same river on just such another afternoon, but not as a *boy*, with mind free from care and without a thought beyond the enjoyment of the present moment. Ah

well, that is past; but as long as there is country to enjoy, and boys are boys, and rheumatism not very bad, it is a man's own fault if he ever ceases to extract *some* pleasure out of life, and I for one sha'n't grumble because I have eaten my cake—I will pick up the crumbs and be thankful that I can yet enjoy them.

I remember on one occasion, when we had tried all the favourite holes and had tempted the fish with worms, caddis-bait, and paste, to no purpose, we determined to have a good swim, so, selecting a quiet deep-looking hole free from weeds, we undressed, and leaving our clothes on the bank, plunged in, and for the next quarter of an hour amused ourselves after the manner of boys in water. On hearing a roar above us, we looked up, and oh! murder! there, standing immediately over us, was Farmer Green's *bull!* There was no mistaking it, it was snow-white, with cruel, short, sharp horns, and with a most wicked, sinister look in its cold dull eyes. We had often heard of him, and now and then seen him at a distance, but never before had we ventured into the field where he was feeding. He had made himself celebrated, so village gossip said, by tossing the yard-man over a turnip bin, and by knocking down a poor woman, who only saved herself from being gored to death by rolling into a ditch. Well! there he stood within a few yards of us, scraping up the turf sideways, first with one foot, then with the other, and at the same time growling like suppressed thunder. And there stood we! naked, and likely to remain so if Mr. Bull only stood his ground. We at once fished up big stones from the bottom of the river and threw them in his face, but he ducked his head, and though we often hit him about his neck and body it

only increased his rage. At last, Bob took a swim down the river, and then got out and showed himself on the bank. Off started Mr. Bull, and as soon as he had done so I crept out, grabbed all our clothes, and made a bolt with them in the opposite direction; and though the bull soon saw how he had been cheated and gave chase to me, I succeeded in getting to a shallow part of the stream, and crossing over, we dressed in fear and trembling, for the brute was so infuriated it seemed as if he would take to the water and attack us afresh.

Some time after this, Mr. Bull got a sharp lesson in manners. A gentleman whilst out shooting had to cross the field he was in, when the bull at once "made for him," the gentleman "made for" the gate, and only just succeeded in escaping over it. He at once drew his charge all except the powder, and then by teazing the bull tempted him close to the gate. Bang went the gun, and over toppled the beast, but was on his legs again in a moment, and away he scampered, thoroughly frightened, and, I suspect, with a feeling in his nose as if he had set it on fire. I remember Farmer Green told us some years after, that the bull had become such an "outrageous rogue that he had to be killed and salted down for the navy." I suppose sailors, especially the Queen's, are very fond of bull, for I have been told over and over again that old bulls were sold for them to eat, and once, when driving in Leicestershire, I passed over a hundred old worn-up bulls, and the drover, when asked what he was going to do with such a lot, said "Pickle 'em down for the navy."

CHAPTER VI.

OLD BACON.—THE POACHERS.—A FATAL SHOT.—A SPOILT BOY.

I HOPE the parsons will forgive me for saying so, but as far as my experience and observation, as boy and man, go, I have found that the worst characters and the most useless men in the parish are to be found, in some shape or other, attached to the rectory, and the reason is, I believe, that the farmers will not burden themselves with such trash. My father's rectory was no exception to the rule, and I am obliged to confess that I have seen more time idled away and worse work done there than would take a good labourer a life-time to recover. Old Bacon was, however, in every way an exception to this rule, and I am proud to number him as one of the greatest friends of my youth, and shall, as long as I live, feel grateful to him for the hundred-and-one useful lessons in country life he gave me, commencing with riding the old cow round the yard without a fall, and ending with speaking the truth through thick and thin. Previous to coming into my father's employment, as a sort of odd man about the place, he had worked for twenty years for one farmer for the starvation wages (nine or ten shillings a week) that employers in those days were not ashamed to give.

He had been taken ill, and the farmer, thinking he had about worked the "old 'un up," and fearing he might become a burden on the rates, sent him off to a married daughter who lived in our parish. Fortunately she had no children of her own, and was a worthy daughter of a worthy father, and by the kind nursing she bestowed on the poor old fellow he was soon well, and had many a hard day's work and a happy ending before him. At first, I fear, he had a bad time of it, for he was getting old, was a stranger, and had been sacked from his last place. The farmers would only give him an odd job at boy's wages, and he would have fared badly if he had not drifted into the rectory grounds. My father took him on at first out of charity, but from the day he came to the day he left, old Bacon earned every shilling he got, and not only earned his own wages, but went a long way towards making others do the same by the good example of industry he set them. Old Bacon had worked at pretty nearly every kind of country employment. He commenced by "keeping crows," which I may as well inform the uninitiated means "frightening rooks." Then he had been a bricklayer's boy, and "saw a wonderful sight of life;" then a stable helper, where he had his thigh broken by a vicious horse; then a gentleman's groom, and married the housemaid; then a rough rider for a horse-breaker, and had his other thigh broken, as well as all his fingers on his right hand; then team-man for a farmer, then yard-man, then shepherd, then general labourer, and lastly the parson's man, doing everything, from helping in the church to sharpening young master's "shut knife."

From what I now know of mankind, I think it is a marvel that old Bacon was what he was after the life

he had led, and I can only account for it by supposing he was born one of the honest sons of Old England. In fact, he must have been, for no one with such a broad, upright figure, ruddy complexion, and honest blue eye could have been born bad, and no one could have retained all these who had become so. He was just an honest English peasant, with a fair amount of brains, never disrespectful to his superiors, and yet as independent as a duke. I did not know his wife, for she had died after rearing a large family of boys, and seeing them all well started in the world. Poor thing, her life, as old Bacon would have expressed it, could not have been "all beer and skittles," with wages at ten shillings per week, and a lot of mouths to feed, feet to be shod, and backs to be clothed; but she "got along" somehow in the way thousands like her did, living from hand to mouth; but unlike thousands, she avoided for herself and her "old man" parish relief and a pauper funeral.

One of the first jobs old Bacon did on the premises was to build a little house in the plantation for us to keep our ferret hutches in, and so made great friends with us boys. Many and many's the afternoon I have worked with him, and the knowledge I then picked up has often stood me in good stead since. In the long winter evenings we would step off to Bacon's cottage, and sit over his wood fire, listening open mouthed while he told us tales of horse-breaking, and all kinds of adventures he had seen or heard of, and all the time the old fellow would keep his hands busy, making buskins, mending an old jacket or boot, or shaping out the "haft" of some tool. His short cutty pipe, on these occasions, was never out of his mouth, and he would

say there was more real comfort to be got out of a pinch of good "baccy" than anything else a poor man could get. "That's the worst of night watching (you know I did a lot o' that when I lived under Squire Trapum), you dussent light a match, and if you did, you daren't take the lessest draw at a pipe, or the poachers would smell it and be off.—Ever taken a poacher? Well, I have *helped* to. I was out with the keepers when we had the big fight on Barton heath, and young Bob Gripper got shot, poor rogue! Ah! I don't mind tellin' you all about it, though I don't 'zactly know all of myself, seeing as how I lay most of the time the fight was a-going on onsensed in the bottom of a ditch; but there—I'll tell you what I know'd on myself, and what I heard from others arterwards. Well, you see that year we had riz a powerful sight of pheasants, some in the home plantain and some in Barn Wood, more than a mile off, and the Squire had asked a lot o' gents to come, as it might be that werry day week, to shoot, so we keepers and night-men were all on the sharp look-out. It was on a Monday night, a'most as bright as day, for there was a full moon a shinen' through a kind of drizzly rain, and all on us concealed in one place or another, when just about midnight we heard the guns go off in the direction of an out-lying plantain, near Barn Wood, then a lot of shouten' and more firen', and we supposed our pals over there were in for a big job. The head-keeper comes a runnen' up to me, and says, says he, 'Bacon, you stop here concealed at this 'ere gate, and I and the t'others will go and lend a hand yonder. I dussent take you as it may be a plant, and when we are gone the beggars 'll be in here.' I hadn't been alone, standen' at

the little gate leaden' out of the plantain on to the heath, a quarter of an hour before I saw first one man and then another get up out of the bracken within five yards of me. There were eight on 'em in all, and had got half their faces blackened. They all on 'em had guns in their hands, and came right straight on for the gate. When they were a-openen' of it, I stands up and faces 'em, and says quite perlite like, 'By your leave, mates, there ain't no road here.' 'So I sees,' says one, 'and by the time we come again I hopes as how you will get one made. Stand out of the way, young man, for I have a perty of friends I have invited to shoot here. It ain't a mite o' good your tryen' to stop us; we know you are alone, and that darned keeper and the t'others are a mile away. We dont want to hurt you, but if you only imitate to stop us, blowed if we don't make cold meat of you.' I slips my two fingers in my mouth and gives a whistle so ——, but it was the last time I whistled for some time, for no sooner had I done it than one of the men heaved a big stone at me, and catches me fair in the mouth, and I then lost all my front teeth, and didn't find 'em again; I s'pose I bolted 'em. This kinder riz my dander, so I spits on my hand, takes my stick, and at 'em I goes. I remember hitten' away pretty hard and getten' hit for some time, and then I remember no more till I found myself a lyen' on my side in the bottom of the ditch kinder dazed like. It warn't comfortable, so I gets out as well as I could, and then I hears a lot o' swearen' and noise right across the wood, and off I makes for it, but I had to stop now and again, for the blood would keep a runnen' out of a lot of holes I had got in my head and a getten' into my

eyes. Whilst I stood a moppen' away at my face with my hanker, I heard some one a comen', runnen' and a blowen' up the ride, so I just steps to the side of a tree, and takes a peep round, and soon sees it is one of the right customers; so when he comes opposite I lets out my foot and down he goes, and afore he could move I had my hand in his neckerchief and my thumb under his ear. He kicked for a bit, but at last he lies quiet, and out comes his tongue, so I takes out a bit o' cord from my pocket, and turnen' him over on his face, soon fastens his two thumbs together behind him. I had hardly done it when he gives a grunt and says, 'I'll give in, don't you go for to maul me.' 'No fear,' says I, 'not if you behave proper.' Just then I hears more people runnen' up a ride near, but I could not see them, and thought it best to keep squat. The next minute I hears some one say, 'I'm goen' to shoot if you come on the bank;' and then a gun goes off and I hears a groan. I turned cold all over, for I felt right sure some bloody work had been done by some one; but it was no good stoppen' there, so I picks up the man's gun and makes him walk afore me down the wood, till in a clear open spot I comes on my pals, five on 'em, and with me there should have been seven, so I know'd one was a missen', and I guessed where he was, poor rogue. With the keepers were the poachers, tied hand and foot, leastways two was, but the t'other had a broken leg, and so did not want tyin'. Two of the keepers were badly hurt, both shot in the legs and a bleeden' like pigs, and the t'others were more nor less knocked about. Just as I came up to 'em up came the old Squire with a lot o' servants and stablemen, who took charge of the poachers and the most hurt of the

keepers, and me and the Squire, and two more went off to where I had heard the shot fired. I went first, feelen' mazen' bad, for I kinder felt what I was a goen' to see, and I waru't far wrong, for on getten' near the bank there I see'd poor Bob Gripper a lyen' on his back with a trickle o' blood a-comen' out of his mouth. He was quite dead, shot through the heart, but this I did not know for the best part of a month arter, for, if you'll believe me, I was that fule I fainted dead away like a mawther (girl), and then went and had a brain fever. One o' the keepers told me arterwards that the old Squire stood up right over poor Bob, and said out bold, 'God forgive me this, I swear I'll never preserve game again, or allow enough in my woods to tempt men.' And he kept his word. Many of the gentlefolks blamed him, but he would answer, 'You haven't stood on a blusteren' rainy November night at the edge of a wood, and looked in the face of a splendid young fellow lyen' there stark and dead, and know'd that he had died for your amusement.'

"Poor old Squire, he was most wonderful put about; but he did the gentleman by Bob Gripper's wife, and settled fifteen shillens a week on her and her little girl; she as is now nus at the big house, and is a-goen' to marry the head-keeper. The poor old Squire was took hisself a year or so arter, and a mazen' bad job that was for me, for if he'd a lived I should never have wanted for bit or sup. You see the property went to a cousin that lived in forren parts, and he didn't come to live at the old place, and the new agent who looked arter things didn't know about us poor folk, so I, for one, had to make a move and look out for fresh work.

"You hope the poachers got punished? Well, poor

rogues, they did, them as we had got hold on were tried at the 'sizes and were sent over the seas, all excep' one sneaken' warmint that turned Queen's evidence agin him as shot poor Gripper, and that I think was the worst of all the job. You see him as did it was a young chap named Orger. His father had been the Squire's servant when he was in the army, and followed the Squire here when he came into the property, and soon after married Mary Green, the gardener's daughter, a rare proper pretty mawther! They had one child, a boy, and then the father was took bad o' the innards and died. The Squire and his lady were wonderful kind to Mary, and a lot too kind to the boy, for even when he were quite a little mite they began a spoilen' of him, and by the time he was big enough to earn his wittles he was good for nothen', and too much the gentleman to hurt hisself by work. He had a werry pretty woice, and used to go and sing of an evening at the big house to the gentlefolk, and from this he got a-goen' to the public, and would sing and go on because the fules there would laugh at him. At last the Squire spoke kinder sharp to him, and said he feared he was doen' no good and would come to mischief, and the lad he cheeked the Squire, and said he could mind his own business. His poor mother was that fond of him she never could see that the boy warn't perfect, and she'd work and slave to find money for the idle young chap. He was about twenty-one when the big poaching bout took place, and got led into it by some chaps he had made friends with at the public in the next town, where he frequented for singing. He had never been out afore, and when they were a-starten' he refused to take a gun, as the t'others

did; but they laughed at him and said as how he was afear'd, and last of all he took one. In the fight in the wood he got a good bit knocked about, mostly by Gripper, and had got a bit mad, so as he was a runnen' away Gripper called out to him by his name to stop, a-showen' he know'd who he was, and so you see he just turned round and shot Gripper. On the trial he said he never meant to do more than wound him, and pointed at his legs as he stood up on the top of the bank, but just as he pulled the trigger Gripper stept down, and so got the whole charge right in his heart. On the trial the Squire said all as ever he could for him, but the judge he said it was an outdacious case, and so he was condemned to be hung for murder. A lot of the gentlefolks wrote to the Queen and axed her to let him off, and just two days afore he was to a been hung she wrote and said she would, only he must be sent over the seas for life.

"From the time he was condemned his poor mother took on terrible, and he hadn't been sent away a month afore she just died of a broken heart. We heard arterwards that Orger tried to make his escape from prison, but was seen and shot by a gaoler, and so, poor fellow, there was an end of him; but lor' how I do keep a talken'! Just give us your leg up here and let me see how this here buskin fits, and then you run off home. Your ma will be in a fine way at your being out so late, and she'll blame me—there—good night! run home as fast as you can." And we did run home, keeping well in the middle of the road, and casting many a side-long look into the shade of the hedges, half expecting to see the ghost of Bob Gripper peeping out at us.

CHAPTER VII.

RURAL SUPERSTITION.—A WISE WOMAN.—SETTING A MARK.—THE EVIL EYE ON THE CUCUMBERS.—BOASTING.—YOUNG POACHERS.—CAUGHT IN THE ACT.—RATTLING DOWN THE BROOK.

TALKING of ghosts, there are few gentlemen even amongst those who have spent all their lives in the country, who have the slightest idea how deeply rooted superstition is amongst the poor. I am convinced that amongst the agricultural labourers in the east of England (I say east of England, for it was there I lived as a boy and got my experience) there is not one in ten that does not firmly believe in witchcraft, and there are few that in the course of their lives do not apply to some reputed "wise man" or woman for charms against the power of witches. The poor know that we hold such belief in contempt, and for fear of being laughed and sneered at hide their superstition, and it is only to a few whom they trust that they will talk about it. I have known poor men and women stint themselves for months to be able to save up sufficient money to pay a "wise woman" to remove the power of some supposed witch from off them, their child, or their beast; and I have also known a poor man walk a mile out of his way every day going and coming from work rather than pass the house of some

person supposed to have the power of "overlooking" him.

Should a hen leave her nest and let her half-hatched eggs get cold, a donkey cast a shoe on the road and so lame itself; should a child become consumptive, or a husband returning home from the village pot-house mistake his way and walk into the pond, they have been "overlooked," and there is no way out of the trouble but by paying the "wise woman" to take the spell off. This was so thirty years ago, when I was a boy, and I know it is so now, and so it will be till the labourer has the spell removed for good by the schoolmaster.

"Believe it, in course I do! I *know* it puts me out, it do, how you gentlefolk, and specially the parsons, can go clean again the Bible. Why, don't that tell you there are witches? but *I* don't want that to tell me, I know it of myself. Why! look you here, just afore last Michaelmas my missus had a lot of as nice young geese as ever I seed—well, someone overlooked them, and, if you'll believe me, and I aint a deceiven' you, all on a sudden like they are right swarmen' with lice! My missus she washes 'em and messes on about 'em for days and days; at last she begins a botheren' me to go and speak to the wise woman at Barford. I ha'n't got enough money by me at first, and it aint the lessest mossel of good a goen' with an empty pocket, but my missus, unbeknown to me, had been a saven' up a trifle 'gainst getten' our young one christened; well, she gives this to me, and so I takes the dutfan (bridle) to catch the hobby (pony). I was just a getten' him into the cart when I hears the old woman a callen' like mad, and when I goes to her, she says, 'Well there, John, you

might knock me down with a feather, du just look at them geese, they are as clean as a new-laid egg;' and so they were, leastways as far as them things were concerned, there warnt one on 'em on all the geese, and the poor critters looked bootiful 'cept for the yaller of the sulpher my wife had darbed 'em with the night afore. Now arter *that, du* you think I don't believe in the wise woman? there! she was that strong I had no call to du more than *settle* to go to her and the spell was taken off.

"When I lived at Farmer Todd's someone kept a *per*-loinen' the wheat off the granary, and we were most all on us suspected, till one day we seed the yardman a riden' out of the yard on master's hobby. Says I, 'Bor, where are you off to now?' Says he, misterous like, 'Barford!' and I know'd in a moment what he was arter. That night there was a lot of us chaps a sitten' smoken' and a roasten' beans on the top of the stove in the shepherd's hut, when in comes the yardman and sits hisself down. Says I, 'Did she tell you who it was as took the corn?' 'No,' says he, 'no more she will, but she'll put a mark on him as did that, that'll soon speak for itself. I told her all about it and gave her some money, when she up and spoke quite awful like, says she, 'I set a mark on that man that all may see, he shall have a great horn grow right out of the middle of his forehead!' I was a sitten' right opposite Jack Long, and I sees him look skeared and slip his hand up to his head. Well, if you'll believe me, that werry next mornen' up goes Jack to master, and begins a cryen', and he says, 'For God's sake, master, forgive me, I 'fess as how I took the corn, and I have a great horn a growen' right out of my head!' Could I

see it? Well, no, but he could feel it a comen', and if he hadn't a spoken to master, and master hadn't sent to the wise woman and axed her to take the spell off at once, he'd ha' been a dead man afore now."

I had taken some trouble to raise from seed a few young melon plants in a frame. On Sunday after church, I walked round with the gardener to take a look, and on opening the frame, I found all my young plants with their heads and leaves drooping and withered, evidently scorched up by the burning sun. I blamed the gardener, telling him he should have protected them with matting.

"That wouldn't have been the lessest good; that arn't the sun that have done this."

"Well, what is it then?"

"Oh! I know. You wouldn't be guided by me, Master, and would have the frame put right in sight of the road!"

"Well, what on earth has the road got to do with it?"

"Oh! I know; but you won't believe me if I tell ye."

"Out with it, man, I will know, so you may as well tell me at once."

"Why, they have been *overlooked* in coorse. Times and times I have been minded to speak to you about old Mrs. Coke, a nasty, wishous old warmint, and now she has been and overlooked these here melons, and they are all spoilt. That ain't no good o' me a toilen' and moilen' when such as she is allowed to come a peeren' about the place. Well, Sir, you may say it's 'bosh,' and o' coorse you gentlefolks know best; but you'll excuse me, Sir, if you'll be guided by me, you'll just give her

notice to quit her cottage, and then we shall be rid of her, for there ain't another soul in the parish as will let her a house; oh! she has done a sight of harm, and there is plenty more than me as can speak to it. It was only last Monday week that Mrs. Stephens killed a pig, and afore Wednesday night more nor half on it turned bad, and that was just arter Mrs. Coke came to fetch away a leg she had bought; you may depend on it her leg didn't turn bad. Besides, Sir, what do the Bible tell us? In coorse there *are* witches, and I for one would like to see 'em all drownded."

Ah, well, this is all very shocking, but it is, I think, natural; I believe we are all of us born superstitious, and that even the best educated have a weak spot somewhere. How about sitting down thirteen to dinner? How about getting married on a Friday? You felt rather queer, Madam, the other night when you had to practise the organ all alone in the church with only a tallow dip to light up the big building? What were you afraid of? Did you expect or dread harm from the *living?* I, myself, confess to being superstitious about what I call *Boasting.* I hate saying, or hearing said, such things as "I have not had a fall out hunting all this year," or "I never broke a bone in my life." I, not long ago, stood on the foot-plate of a locomotive, talking to the driver, when he said, "Yes, she is a lucky engine: I have driven her four years and she has never left the rails." Just as he uttered the last words it gave a hop, and after ploughing twenty yards through the sleepers came to a stand-still well off the rails, buried three feet in the ballast. We may be sorry that the labourer is superstitious, but before we *laugh* at him, let us make quite sure there is not much the same

thing in us to laugh at. Perhaps when we have done this we may be able to teach the poor man to be more open with us, and have a chance of talking him out of his superstition.

I have said that the farmers in our parish had given us leave to kill rats and rabbits, a permission of which we had so well availed ourselves that it was often very difficult to find these noble vermin, and we longed for fresh fields to roam over. Adjoining one of the farms where we had permission—but not in our parish—there was a large farm belonging to a Mr. Wood, and whenever we found a rabbit in a neighbouring field it made tracks straight away through the hedge and into an old marl pit full of rough brushwood, about a hundred yards beyond our boundary. Over and over again we had called Pepper and Wasp back from this happy hunting-ground, and had longed to be allowed to follow them, and make an end of the numerous rabbits that had so often thus escaped us, but somehow we had got into our silly young noddles an idea that Mr. Wood was a perfect ogre, thirsting for the—well, if not blood—at all events the liberty of any boys that went trespassing and poaching on his ground, and that, if caught on the forbidden ground, nothing could save us from months on the treadmill. Oh! what evil-minded wretches those old big-headed stub rabbits were! How they tempted us day after day to our destruction; and then, why was there always a gap in the hedge just opposite the pit? It was more than poor human nature could withstand, and we were but boys; so, tempted by the obstinate perversity of the rabbits, and the reproachful looks of Pepper and Wasp when we called them back, we one day made a dash over the gap and into the pit.

For a few minutes after we were hidden therein, we felt the enormity of the crime we were committing, but soon a few whines from Wasp, as she stood scratching

YOUNG POACHERS.

at a hole, made us forget it, and, popping the ferret in with a string on, we had for half an hour sufficient work to distract our minds from everything else. After

digging in the stiff clay for some time we came down upon two rabbits, which we killed, and then walked out into the open space at the bottom of the pit, to gloat over our spoil and to "hurdle" the rabbits, that is to say, to slip one hind leg through a hole made under the hamstrings of the other. We had just done this, and tied up the ferret in the bag, when directly over us we heard—"Does your mother know you're out?" whistled in a low key, and, on looking up, there sat the awful Mr. Wood just above us! It was no good bolting, first, because Mr. Wood looked very much like running fast; secondly, because he knew who we were; thirdly, because he was directly between us and home; and fourthly, because somehow we felt it was not the right thing to do. Yet it was an awful thing to have to climb up that steep bank in front of him and open a conversation; but there was nothing else for it, so, after clambering up to his side, we began by making hurried excuses, which he cut short by saying, "Oh! that's all right, I am glad the beasts are killed. You seem to have two good dogs, and to know your work, there are more rabbits there, just run your dogs round and let's see how they hunt."

For a moment we could not believe our ears—but the next—at it we went. "Loo in, Wasp! search him out, Pepper! at it, good dogs; drive him through; hie him up there!" And for more than two hours we worked away, and the result was, we returned to the top of the bank with four couple of rabbits. Mr. Wood took two couple and walked off, but when he had got a hundred yards away, he turned and said, "Can you kill rats as well as you do rabbits? if you can, I wish you would come and kill mine; if you will do so you are welcome

to all the rabbits you can get; but mind, you must kill the rats first." Wonders will never cease! here we are on the great unknown forbidden ground, caught in that most awful of all awful of country crimes, poaching and trespassing, and yet we are not on our way to the treadmill; but on the contrary are invited to come again whenever we like, and are quietly walking home with three brace of rabbits on our backs. I am wrong, however, in saying we were "walking quietly home," for our joy was so great that it made us very erratic in our movements, and in the mile we had to go, we took more out of our legs than the dreaded treadmill would have done in a week. Wasp and Pepper were equally excited, and even the ferrets seemed, by the way they scratched and tore at the bag, to be as pleased as we were. On getting home we rushed into the house to tell the good news, and our pleasure was brought to a climax by our father's telling us we might have a whole holiday next day, so as to be able to make the most of our new pleasure. We set to work preparing at once. The ratting spade was sharpened; Hannah Wiseman persuaded to make a new ferret bag; a new ferret line bought at the village shop, and knotted at every yard so that we might know exactly how far into a hole the ferret had gone. Pepper and Wasp were well fed and put to bed early, and the ferrets got only half rations that they might be sharp and active on the morrow. We ourselves went to bed early, for once, without being ordered off, but for hours we lay tossing and restless, first picturing to ourselves the swarms of rats we should find and kill, and then plunged into the depths of melancholy at the bare chance of a wet day or some other mishap. Wonderful to say, the next day proved

quite up to our fondest hopes as far as the weather was concerned. The dogs were "fit" and ready, and the ferrets as strong and active as we could wish. Breakfast was swallowed in a hurry, and then, with a hunch of bread and cheese wrapped up and stowed away in our wallets, off we started, and were soon on our happy hunting ground,—a long meadow with a small brook running under the hedge bank, which was from one end to the other riddled with fresh rats' holes, and covered with well-developed rats' runs. Slowly and steadily we worked our way from hole to hole with varying success; now four or five rats in the water all together, with the dogs dashing at them, and we ourselves plunging about in the water well over the tops of our boots; then a dig for half an hour, to come at last on a nest of half-eaten young ones, with the ferret curled up in the midst of them. Then an old rat discovered concealed up in the thickest part of the hedge, which had to be brought down dead by a blow from the spade. From the moment we began till two o'clock in the afternoon all was good sport; and when we then sat down under a tree, to eat our lunch, we had fifty rats of all sizes spread out before us. We were here joined by Mr. Wood, who, after expressing his astonishment and satisfaction at the number we had killed, proposed that we should give up rat-catching for that day, as both the dogs and ferrets had had enough of it, and go with him to look for a hare with his two greyhounds which he had brought with him.

We proceeded first to his house, where we left the dogs and ferrets shut up, after giving them a good feed on milk and oatmeal, and then, one of us mounted on "the old mare," and the other on the pony, we pro-

ceeded to some long open layer fields, and soon had a hare on foot with the greyhounds, Spring and Lion, after it. We had a splendid course, and it took all we knew of horsemanship to keep within sight of the dogs, but thanks to friendly gates and gaps we did pretty well, and were only a few hundred yards off where Lion caught the hare as it popped through a thick hedge. We soon had it from the dogs, and then, hanging it to my saddle, we returned to the field where we had left Mr. Wood standing, and after resting the dogs for a quarter-of-an-hour, began to look for another hare. There was no lack of them, but owing to the long course the dogs had had with the first they were a little tired, and the two hares we ran after thus got safely away into a plantation. Never mind; it was splendid fun, and in the last run, worked up to a pitch of excitement, we had jumped a flight of hurdles without coming off! and felt that we were quite equal to riding at the next Military Steeple Chases, and so pleased with our steeds that we were sure they could have won the Grand National! Altogether it was a splendid day, and, unlike most things that are looked forward to with great expectations, had been a perfect success. As darkness closed in we trudged home pretty well tired out, very dirty, very happy, and with our minds full of plans for the future.

From that day most of our leisure time was spent on his farm, and from first to last we received nothing but kindness from Mr. Wood, to whom I shall always feel grateful for years of pleasure he provided for us, and for the good-tempered and patient way in which he put up with the numerous pieces of boyish mischief we did and the trouble we gave him. He was a thorough

sportsman, from riding to hounds to mole-catching; and taught us many a lesson that in after-life has stood us in good stead. Besides this, from following him about on his farm, and watching the way he managed it, we acquired a knowledge that has given us a keen interest in country life that we otherwise should not have had.

CHAPTER VIII.

COURSING.—SAD CATASTROPHE.—THE CUNNING OF THE HARE.—STEEL TRAPS.—FIRE.—A RUSTIC HERO.—"LIST TO THE POOR ROGUES."

EARLY in this winter Mr. Wood told us that he expected on the morrow a few friends and neighbours for some coursing, and that if we came up to the farm as soon as our lessons were over he thought we might find two ponies ready for us in the stable. I fear this piece of news gave our father a thankless task the next morning, for our minds were much more occupied in wondering whether Mr. Wood's Lion would prove a better dog than Mr. Atmore's Black Prince, than in that, to us, tiresome book, Valpy's Latin Grammar. We went into lessons with our navvy boots on, and a hunch of cold plum-pudding in our pockets, so that we had nothing to do, directly we had finished, but run as hard as our legs could carry us to Hill Farm, where we found, sure enough, two good, rough Welsh ponies on the pillar reins. In less than five minutes we were in a long line of horsemen, riding up and down a ploughed field looking for a hare, Bob Fox trotting in front with the much-respected Lion and much-dreaded Black *Prince in the* slips. During the afternoon we had *some capital sport,* but it proved a very disastrous day

for the greyhounds, and Black Prince was doomed to be the first victim.

We had not joined the party long, before the welcome "Soho" was heard on the left of the line, and at the same moment up jumped a big hare and made off straight in front of us. The two dogs were well slipt, and both together flew the gate at the end of the field, with splendid pluck and dash, and then, getting on pretty good terms with the hare, coursed it over two or three fields, in the last of which was a clump of young beechtrees standing well in the open, without either grass or brushwood beneath them. The hare made for these, closely followed by the greyhounds at top speed, when in the middle of the trees, and as Black Prince was reaching out to take her, she turned sharply round, and in attempting to do the same, the poor dog struck his head full against a tree, and fell over stone dead, with his neck broken. His owner was greatly grieved, for the dog, though little more than a puppy, promised to be a very good one, and for some time a gloom seemed to rest on all the party. The hard-hearted Lion did not stop to cast one look at his fallen rival, but pushing the hare out once more into the open, ran it down single handed, after one of the severest courses I ever saw. We then all moved off to a ploughed field overhanging some meadows, in which were some wide and deep open ditches. Mr. Wood told us that we were sure to find a hare here, as he had often done so, but that it always escaped by popping through a run in the hedge, and then, at the moment the dogs were pushing through the hedge, returning to the field through a hole in the high bank immediately under the run. The dogs thus unsighted, rushed out into the meadow, and

could not be got back till the hare had made its escape. Some one proposed stopping up the hole, and in spite of a few voices prostesting against it, this was done. Mr. Wood's Spring, a very beautiful and valuable black and white dog, was put in the slips with a red one as companion, and we proceeded to look for this cunning hare. Sure enough, in just the middle of the field up it jumped, and was at once recognised by its extraordinary dark appearance. The dogs were slipt, and away they went, and the hare, suspecting nothing, attempted to play her old game. She made a turn or two in the field to get a good start, then dashed for the run, and popped down the bank on the far side, only to find the door of escape shut against her. Poor little beast, she must at that moment have experienced anything but pleasant emotions, but she was not caught yet, and had one more good card to play. Striking boldly out into the meadows, she held her own before the dogs for a very long course, and at last, when both dogs were close to her, and when Spring was about to strike, she made for the brook, but instead of jumping at it, she stopped just on the edge and crouched down on a tuft of reeds growing close to the water. Spring was so near her when she did this that he could not stop himself, and so went head over heels into the icy cold water; the red dog, not being quite so near, had time to think, and so with a tremendous effort cleared the brook. No sooner were both her pursuers thus disposed of, than Puss quietly hopped up the bank, went scuttling away with her ears thrown well back, and before either of the dogs could recross the brook *was out of sight* and safe. Strange to say, this hare *was never seen again*, and I suppose she was so disgusted

by that cunning, two-legged animal, man, having so meanly stopped up her escape-hole that she gave up living in the open, and preferred risking the danger of being shot in a wood.

But, to return to my narrative: Poor Spring was so benumbed by his sudden plunge into the water, that it was with the utmost difficulty he could drag himself out; and when he had done so he stood with his back hunched up, shivering and shaking in every limb. One of the coursers at once stripped off his great-coat and wrapped the poor beast in it, and a man taking him in his arms hurried with him to the farm-house, where he was placed before a warm fire and well rubbed; but in spite of all this care he continued shivering, and after an hour of great suffering he died, having, apparently, shaken himself to death.

We are in the habit of talking of the "timid frightened hare," and to some extent it is a poor nervous creature; but it has more cleverness than people give it credit for, and in my opinion is far more cunning than the fox, who gets the credit of being a very deep fellow, simply from his looks; yet *he* is often caught sleeping, whereas the hare is always, and in every sense, wide awake. If it were not so, it would soon become extinct, for its enemies are named legion; men, dogs, weasels, falcons, and foxes are always hunting it, and day and night it has to keep a sharp look out, and always moves with its life in its hands. Weasels and pole-cats apparently give it most trouble, and it dreads them even more than man. A hare will often come and make its seat, day after day, close to our windows or at the side of the path where men pass a *dozen times* in an hour. It is to get away from the

creeping weasel that the hare makes its seat out in an open field, and there sits with its eyes to protect it in front and its long trumpet-like ears behind. When the wind stirs the leaves in the woods, it is well-known that the hare leaves them for the open; and it does this, I have no doubt, for fear that the rustling of the leaves should hide the sound of an approaching enemy. Kind old dame Nature comes to its assistance, and, by giving it a coat that harmonises with the general colour of the ground it lies on, greatly protects it. Thus in Arctic regions, and wherever the winters are long and the ground constantly covered with snow, the hares are *white;* and I have even noticed that hares living in a parish where the ground is all red sand will be much redder than those in an adjoining one where the land is dark mould. Curiosity is the hare's besetting sin, and often leads her into trouble. Every night she looks round all her accustomed haunts, and nothing new escapes her. I have known poachers take advantage of this to trap her in that vile and iniquitous instrument of torture—the spring-trap—so much in vogue with gentlemen's keepers.

The way they do it is this: They stick up a white stick in a field or garden, surrounded on all sides but one by a few brambles; on the open side they place the trap, covered over and hidden by a little dead grass and leaves. Puss soon discerns the strange object, and her curiosity is so great that she cannot tear herself away until she has had a smell at it. Hop, hop, she goes, round and round the stick, each time getting a little nearer; and then her heart fails her and she dashes off half across the field; but only to return again and have another look; till, at last, with ears pricked forward, in

fear and trembling she all but reaches it, when the ground gives way beneath her, and she is caught fast by the brutal, *no, worse* than brutal, *human!* invention, and all night she lies and struggles with both her front legs smashed to atoms.

There is no living creature so marvellously inconsistent as man. There are thousands of good and humane men who subscribe handsomely to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who are shocked at the poor man using a dog to help him in dragging his hand-cart; who lose their temper at the very thought of a horse being flogged or a bird's nest being taken—who yet allow their keepers, night after night, to set scores of these vile traps, or set them themselves; and then, after saying their prayers, go quietly to bed and to sleep, never giving a thought for a moment to the dozen or so of rabbits that are then struggling, maimed and bloody, in their woods; or, if they think of it at all, they hope for good success! Then how we shudder when we hear that Farmer Todd killed and sold, as human food, his heifer that fell into the saw-pit and broke its leg. "What! eat a beast whose flesh is all corrupt from fever that its agonies have created? No, never! And, I tell you what, those London inspectors are not half sharp enough, and magistrates should always inflict the highest penalty when such a case is brought before them. I would as soon eat——" Stop, sir! a minute; say "a rabbit or hare" that has gone through the same. No, the inspectors are not sharp enough; so we will pass the butchers' and go on to the fish market to buy a brace of the rabbits we see hanging up there, *all with broken legs!* People say, "But how are we to kill our rabbits, if not in this way?" If

your keeper is worth his salt, or if you understand woodcraft yourself, you may kill them all off and yet never set one of these vile traps. I can point out a large estate, where game swarms; yet where the cruel spring-trap has been discarded for years. Vermin of all sorts, from the stoat to the cat, are *killed* at once by the figure-of-four trap; and rabbits, by the thousand, are killed in snares. Dozens of pheasants are killed on every large estate by creeping into steel-traps. Game preservers do not often know this, for naturally the keeper does not tell his master; but if the master would only get up at daybreak, as I have done, and visit the traps with the keeper, he would soon convince himself of the truth of this, and would, I think, give up the use of so fiendish an invention.

There is nothing that I know of that stirs up people living in the country, or causes amidst all classes so much excitement, as to discover after dark a red flickering glare and then flames shooting up, and to hear the awful name of "Fire" shouted from mouth to mouth. If it is within reach, all, young and old, rich and poor, start for it as soon as they can; and if it is too far off, they watch the distant glow and speculate where and what it is. Nine people out of ten settle that it is just half the distance off it really is, and are quite indignant at the wise one who puts it in its proper place. I shall never forget the intense excitement, and I fear I must add *pleasure*, a fire was to us boys. Yes, *pleasure;* for though we had a feeling, half of fear, half of awe, at seeing the red flames in the distance; yet pleasure predominated, and more than *once* we felt utterly miserable because our father would *not let us start at* ten o'clock at night to run a score of

miles across country to see some distant flare-up. Once we did steeplechase for three miles over hedge and ditch, much to the detriment of all our garments, to arrive at last in a quiet field where a heap of quicks was burning! It was a great disappointment, akin to that of reading through the deaths in the paper and not seeing the name of anyone you know; but we hoped for better luck in the future, and peeped from behind our bed-room blinds, with our noses flattened against the glass, every night before getting into bed, on the chance of having the glorious excitement. "What bad boys!" Yes! no doubt we were very bad, and so we were often told by dear old Hannah Wiseman; and yet it was only the same feeling that makes the officer fret and fume when he hears that a cautious minister has prevented the flames of war breaking out and enveloping half Europe—the boy is only father to the man!

One day, during the Christmas holidays, we two boys had spent from directly after breakfast till dark, plodding through high turnips with an elder brother who was shooting. We arrived home tired and hungry, and after feeding the dogs and ferrets, which we always did ourselves, we sat down on the back stairs to take off our wet and dirty boots; but, before a knot was unfastened, old Bacon put his head in at the door and said, "Just you come out here, young gentlemen; there's somethin curus up, or I'm mistaken." In a moment we were in the stable yard, and saw great sheets of flame dancing and shooting up into the sky. All fatigue and hunger were as effectually over in a moment as if we had had a good supper and been in bed for hours; and so, muddy and dirty as we were, we dashed into

the dining-room where my father was sitting at dinner with a few guests, and shouted out our news; then, taking no further heed to the suggestion of my mother that we wanted feeding, than to snatch up a handful of bread, we rushed out of the house and straight away across country, guided by the flames, leaving our elders to follow as they liked. We had a mile to go, and in this distance only halted once; but the awful stillness of the pitchy night behind us, in contrast to the glare of the fire with its dull roar in front, produced almost a panic in our young minds, and off we started and never stopped again till we found ourselves standing with some two hundred others in front of four burning ricks in Jack Porter's yard. In all country parishes—at least, I have found it so—there are one or two persons who are looked upon as "black sheep." They never do any regular work, are constantly at the pothouse, never at church, and every one agrees that they are good for nothing. A gentleman was once asked if he had a horse that would carry a lady. At first he said "No;" but on second thoughts said, "Yes he had: at all events he had a beast that would not go in harness, and no man could sit it for a minute; it could not have been created for nothing; so, doubtless, it was born to carry a lady!" On the same principle, these "Good for nothings" must have been created for something; and, on this occasion, the whole parish discovered that they were "made for a fire!" There were two of them; Alfred Spicer and Happy Jack (I forget his real name). Spicer was one of the first to reach the fire, and, unlike all the others, he did not stand with his mouth open, *staring* and saying, "Lawk a mussy me;" but in half a *minute he had* Jack Porter's old gig-horse out and was

away to call out the "ingins," three miles off. A few minutes after we had been helping our neighbours to stare at the fire, Happy Jack came dashing amongst us; and, just calling us a set of "darned fules," he gave (in a voice that at once commanded obedience) a few orders, and in five minutes had organized a chain of pails from the horse-pond to a large wheat-stack that

RICK ON FIRE.

as yet had not taken fire, but on which thousands of sparks were falling. He himself ended the chain, as, standing on the top of the stack amidst blinding smoke and heat that blistered his face, he dashed the water over the thatch as fast as he received the pails. At the pothouse door he was a stupid grinning lout, on the top of the stack he was the picture of a hero; and his looks did not belie him, for it is of just such stuff that half the gallant fellows are made who have caused

English pluck and dash to be respected from one end of the world to the other. By his presence of mind and energy, the rick, worth a large sum of money, was saved; and, when the fire-engine arrived, most of its work had been done and all saved that could be. The stacks that were on fire soon burnt themselves into great crumbling smouldering balls of ashes, on which the water from the engine made little impression; so we boys, having seen all there was to be seen, dragged ourselves once more home about midnight, now more dead than alive with fatigue. When the fire was at its height, a flock of plover, attracted by the strange light, kept swooping over it and uttering weird low screams. Just in front of me stood a group of old women; and, when the plovers first made this noise, I heard one of them say to her neighbour, "Lor! just list to those poor rogues of rats; poor dumb critturs, how they du shriek sure-ly!" and she was answered by the other saying, "So they du 'bore, but I dont pity them a mite. It sarves 'em right for being such mis-chie-vous warmints."

I am glad to say this fire was not caused by an incendiary, as many were in those days of low wages and discontent; but by some small children, who, knowing no better, had amused themselves by striking matches and setting light to the ends of the straws that stuck out of the stack.

CHAPTER IX.

SPARROW CATCHING.—PARTRIDGES IN THE NET.—TRICKED.—SOLD AGAIN. — SPARROW PUDDING. — STEALING A TAIL. — BUYING DUCKS.—CLEVER COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION.

A FAVOURITE amusement with us boys, during the long winter months, was sparrow catching; and, by dint of saving up all our pocket-money for a long, long time, we at last succeeded in becoming the proud proprietors of a good "clap-net," and also one for bat fowling. Many and many were the afternoons we spent hidden in some little hut formed of hurdles covered with straw placed over a ditch, and kept one eye strained through a small peep hole watching the net, which was generally set on ground where lately a wheat-stack had stood.

The best time for this sport was when the ground was freshly covered with snow; for then, by scraping it away, placing the nets on the cleared spot, and throwing down a little dross wheat between them, all the sparrows in the neighbourhood were pretty sure sooner or later to flock down upon it. In this, as in all other sports, patience is the great requisite; and often for lack of this we had to drag ourselves, benumbed and cold, out of our hut without catching a single bird. At other times, when we had resisted the temptation of pulling the line for the first half-dozen birds that came

to feed, but had given the flock time to gain confidence and, after many a flutter up and down, quietly to settle between the nets in a thick mass, a good strong pull would bring the nets over and as many as fifty birds would be taken at once.

Now and then we would muster up our courage, and long before it was daylight turn out of our warm beds, and dispensing with such extras as tubs and hair-brushing, huddle on our clothes, and, taking our nets in a bag, let ourselves out of the back door, and, guided solely by the light of the stars, run shivering and shaking to some favourite spot. By the time the first sparrow began to twitter, we had spread our nets and were ourselves curled up on the damp straw in the hut we had prepared the day before, and would sit there with our hands thrust into our pockets half perished with cold; but then what a rich reward we reaped when at last we pulled the string and saw the nets come quickly over on a large flock of birds.

I fear, had circumstances favoured it, we should, in spite of the warning tales old Bacon used to tell us, have become thorough-going young poachers; and, as it was, many a bird and beast, whose name was honorably mentioned on the game-list, found its way into our wallets. For instance I remember one early winter's morning, when the ground was covered with some inches of snow, and when the keen north-east wind almost congealed the young blood in our veins, our nets were set on the round from whence a stack had been taken in the day before. For half-an-hour we had sat silently in our hut, and the ground between the nets was getting quite covered with sparrows, and I was twisting the line *round my hand* ready for the pull; when, burr! up went

every bird in a sheet of fluttering wings to the old pollard tree. We kept quite quiet, and in a moment Bob, who was taking a peep out of the side of the hut, said, or rather just breathed out, "Oh-h what beauties! eight of them; keep still, and we shall get the lot."

I looked cautiously out, and there saw, within ten yards of the net, a covey of partridges coming quietly but doubtfully on, led by a glorious old cock-bird, with a splendid ruddy horse-shoe on his breast. With many a halt and cautious look round, on came the old fellow; and, at last, after what appeared an age to us, he strutted into the fatal spot, followed by all his family. One moment, to allow them to settle themselves; then, with a good pull at the line, flap over came the net, and the entire covey were jumping and fluttering beneath it. We were on them directly, and a few minutes later they were all transferred to our wallets with their necks broken. The nets were at once taken up and we ran off home, very frightened at the enormity of the crime we had committed, but quite ready to do the same again if ever we got the chance.

Our father (in, I must say, rather a feeble manner) read us a lecture; but, as the birds were safe in the pantry, and there was a satisfied twinkle in the dear mother's eyes, we did not much care, and, by the time they appeared on the table, we talked openly of the glorious fun it was.

Our elder brother, who was paying us a Christmas visit, played us a capital trick in connection with these early risings. We had been talking one night of our intention of getting up the next morning; and, to ensure our waking, had borrowed from the cook *a small alarum* clock which we placed close to our

beds. We went to bed very early, and were soon asleep. Later on, my brother crept into the room on tiptoe, and put the alarum on two hours. The consequence was we got into our hut and had everything ready, and then sat waiting on and on till we were fairly puzzled; and, finally, feeling sure some great mistake had been made and that it must be the middle of the night, we scuttled off home, and were into bed and asleep again before daybreak, and came down at last to breakfast to get well laughed at. We paid him out, however, later on in the day. Our father was anxious to send a hamper of game to an aunt in London; so my brother took his gun and sallied forth, followed by us boys and the two dogs. We made a short day of it, as he had letters to write for post; but we succeeded in making a pretty good bag, and among the various items was a fine hare. No sooner was my brother settled down to his writing, than we took the hare out; and, having first fixed a ticket round its neck with "Sold again" written on it in big letters, we arranged it as if on a seat on some thick bushes, but in such a place that it could just be seen from about twenty yards distant.

We then rushed into the house and told my brother there was a hare under a bush, in the shubbery; and, slipping on his wet boots and taking his gun, out he ran. It was some time before he could discern the hare; but at last, when he did so, fearing it might get away through the bushes as soon as disturbed and so prevent his getting a shot, he took deliberate aim and fired. On running to the spot and picking up the hare, he discovered the ticket, saw the joke, and retired discomfited, amid the chaff of the whole household, we *having put them* up to the fun.

On bright cold nights we would start off after tea with our bat fowling-nets and visit all the hay-stacks, ivied walls, and bushy trees for miles round, and often made great catches; but it was cold work to the feet and hands, and, coming after the numerous active exploits of the day, was very tiring.

When we got a good haul, we plucked the birds and handed them over to the cook, who "just wrapped a piece of dough round them," and those who have not tasted it have no idea how good a sparrow-pudding is.

Now and then, during "the dark hour," and when we could coax Hannah Wiseman to let us do it, we had a roast of sparrows before the nursery fire, which generally ended in the birds being all demolished by the time they were but just getting done; for we began tasting them from the moment they were becoming warm, to make sure they were not being over-roasted. But, of all the various ways of cooking small birds, there is none like spitting them on a thin skewer, and putting them in a Dutch oven with a piece of toast under them, and from time to time basting them with their own gravy, helped out by a piece of butter.

I remember another roast that Bob and I had, and not only do I remember it, but the account of it is told in the parish to this day, though, since it took place, twenty-five years have slipped away.

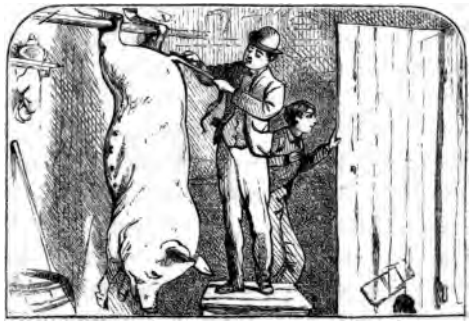
In a cottage near our home lived a Mrs. Turner, who always kept a prime pig indulging in the operation of fatting. One Sunday afternoon, as we stood with her and a neighbour leaning over the door of the pigsty, enjoying the fragrant smell of the self-satisfied looking beast, and admiring the way it was "laying on its fat," *Mrs. Turner,* moved by a generous impulse, said, "There,

Master Harry, when that 'ere pig dies, you shall have one of his feet for your own self,"—a promise hardly calculated to make my mouth water at the time, as the said foot was placed in a filthy black fluid in the corner of the sty; but "petty-toes" are not to be despised, and I at once longed for the death of the pig. A few days after this, as we were walking up the side of a hedge near the cottage looking for rats, out popped Mrs. Turner's tabby-cat; and, in spite of our calls, Wasp bolted off after it, and was so eager in the chase that she dashed straight into the cottage where Mrs. Turner was at work, and gave tabby a good shaking under her owner's petticoats. We came up in time to prevent much harm being done, but also to get the rough side of Mrs. Turner's tongue, who finished up a long string of scolding by saying, "You shan't have the pig's foot, no, that you shan't, nor the lessest mossel of the blessed critter, not even the tip of its tail; there, get along with you and your nasty wicious beasts of dawgs. What you can want to keep such brutes for, I can't think."

We pondered deeply on what she had said, and somehow the mention of the tail made us long for it. A few mornings afterwards, as we were dressing, we heard a squeal that told us the last moments of Mr. Grunter had come; and, once more, that lovely long tail came before our mind's eye, and the vision followed us, ever growing bigger and bigger, through breakfast, through Valpy's Grammar, Barnard Smith's Arithmetic, and ancient and modern history, till our minds were brought to a proper state of equilibrium by a proposition of Euclid, and we determined to have that tail after dinner, cost what it might!

Directly it was possible, we slipped out, and, cautiously

approaching the back of the cottage, reconnoitered the position. All was quiet; so, little by little, we crept up to the washhouse door and took a peep in. There, hanging up by his hind legs which were straddled far apart on the broomstick, was our dear old friend, with his tail looking longer than ever, and as clean and white as snow! The temptation was more than we could stand; so, whipping out a knife, we cut it off close to



STEALING TAIL.

the roots, and hastily beat a retreat with the much desired booty.

On getting home we took the cook into our confidence, and she, nice good-tempered girl, proposed that we should at once roast the tail and eat it; for, as she said, "swallowed wittles, like dead men, tell no tales." We soon hung up the roasting-jack, and, suspending the tail by a string, sat down opposite and watched it twirl round, getting browner and browner at each turn. All went well until it was nearly cooked, when, *to our horror*, the door behind us flew open, and in

bounced Mrs. Turner, exclaiming, "Cook, I know those young gentlemen have stole my tail;" a remark which produced shrieks of laughter from the cook and housemaid, in which the good old woman herself joined after a bit.

I fear this little history will here be thrown aside; for boys have grown moral, and will not like to read of such doings, and no serious-minded parents, with a proper sense of their duty to their offspring, will allow this book to remain in the house. "What! after he has told us on one page that he and his brother killed game, and now confesses to their being thieves! Those boys never came to good, I am sure." Wrong, my friends, those boys have come to good and a lot of good too, and not the least of all the good things they have come to, is having youngsters of their own who cast longing eyes at all sorts of game, and I believe (though of course I pretend not to think so) would whip off a pig's tail as soon as look at it! You may be right, and boys may have grown moral (though I am happy to say I have not come across many of such unnatural monsters); but I hope that as long as boys are boys, they will be boys!

We became owners of pigs ourselves at a very early age, and made a lot of money by them, though I fear they were not always so profitable to our father! We began our stock-keeping in this way. We were out for a long drive one day, and whilst waiting at a country inn to bait our horse, a poultry dealer came to the door with a long flat basket full of fine young ducks on his cart. He soon began descanting on their *merits*, and we boys were filled with the desire to *possess a pair*. First, we obtained our father's leave

to buy them; and then, as we had no money, we borrowed half-a-crown of him to pay for them. On our way home the father asked us how we intended feeding them, and as we had no answer ready, he told us to stop at the village mill and buy a stone of barley-meal; which we did, and to save confusion allowed the miller to put it down in the running account he had with the house. The ducks were shut up in an old pigsty, and as long as the meal lasted we stuffed them well. When this was just finished, my brother-in-law, who lived about five miles off, came to the house one day, and we so vaunted the praises of the two ducks, that he bought them of us for five shillings, and then proposed we should come to lunch a few days later to help to eat them, an invitation we at once accepted. On arriving at his house, we found both he and his wife were from home; so we two sat down to the ducks, and when we had done there were but small pickings for those who should come after us.

Like honourable men of business, we offered to repay the father our borrowed capital, and also for the meal; but, on his saying, "Oh never mind," we, like good boys, obeyed him, and at once wiped all thoughts of the transaction from our minds. Thus, we bought the ducks and fattened them, and did not pay a farthing; then sold them for five shillings, and finished by eating them ourselves! This was a fine commercial transaction, and we saw a way before us of soon getting rich! The five shillings were added to other five shillings that we already had, and soon after a godmother tipping us each with half a sovereign, we managed to buy a lovely little pig for thirty shillings, and for weeks fed it on the waste from the house, and sow-

thistle and hog-weed which we collected in the ditches.

The pig grew and thrived, and so it should, for no pig was better cared for. It was constantly washed with soap and scrub-brush, and at other times was scratched all over with the stump of an old birch-broom, an operation it greatly enjoyed. As soon as it was full-grown, we bought meal for it (on tick !), and commenced the fatting process; and after a while had the pleasure of seeing it hung up from the long steel-yard, and pronounced to be a little over thirteen stone in weight. We sold it to our mother; and after the butcher and miller were paid, we had a clear profit of seventeen shillings on our outlay.

CHAPTER X.

A WINTER'S WALK.—FORAGING FOR A DINNER.—AN ENGAGED SISTER.—A BROTHER-IN-LAW.—SKATING.—A NOVEL CARRIAGE-AND-FOUR.

I MAY as well here tell how we first became acquainted with the above mentioned brother-in-law, and let me recommend all boys who have grown-up sisters to follow our example. One morning when the snow was too deep for ratting, or even sparrow-catching, our father was called from home on business, and we boys had a whole holiday. We determined to employ it in exploring the country, and therefore set off on a long walk.

Away we went at a brisk pace straight ahead, and walked till we were about five miles from home, and past the limit of all previous excursions. Here we found a very pretty village, with first a few trim cottages, then a church, and then a snug-looking red-brick house which looked "The Rectory" all over; and, just beyond again, a high stone bridge over a river. Up to this time we had got on famously, but now we were a little heated from the exertion of plunging through the deep snow, the calves of our legs began to feel tight and our waistcoats loose. The parapet of the bridge offered a comfortable seat; so we perched

ourselves upon it, and commenced speculating on what sort of man the parson might be. We had never seen him, and did not know his name or whether he were married or single; so we had a fine field whereon to build castles.

Time passed quickly, and in about an hour the church-clock struck one. Down we came from our seat; but, oh, in what a different condition from that in which we had got up! We were now cold and shivering, our feet were fearfully painful, the calves of our legs had grown much too big for their skin, and a wolfish hunger was upon us. "I say, Harry," began Bob, "I daresay the Parson is about going to have his lunch; wouldn't you like to help him? I should. How I wish we knew him; if we did we might now call upon him, and he would be pretty sure to ask us to have something to eat."

"Well, Bob, look here, suppose we do call on him. We shall never know him if we don't, and I think it would look civil of us. You know men *do* call on each other. What do you say? I am awful hungry." At first, Bob was modest and raised objections, such as what were we to say when the door was opened, and who were we to ask for? but the pangs of hunger increasing, we became desperate, and marched boldly up to the door and rang the bell. It was opened in half a minute (doors always are quickly opened in well-conducted establishments), and a bright clean tidy-looking maid appeared. I asked at once, "Is your master at home?" and receiving an affirmative answer, continued—

"Then please just tell him we have come to call. *The Master B*——*s*, you know." We were soon shown

into a bright little room with a good fire, where we were quickly joined by the parson himself, a tall cheery looking man with a vastly amused look in his eyes. Again we explained that we had come to call on him, and were at once invited to join him at lunch; but, first of all, he made us take off our wet boots and socks before the fire, and get into others, which, if too large, were at all events warm and dry.

Before lunch was half over we had settled in our minds that he was a "stunner," and that we had done quite the proper thing; and so, feeling pleased with our host, and content with ourselves, our tongues began to move freely, and we informed our new friend, whose name was R——, all about ourselves, our brothers, sisters, cousins, pigs, ferrets and dogs, and all the time kept stowing away helping after helping of cold beef.

When lunch was over, Mr. R. said that as we had been so very kind as to come all this way to call on him, he would return our kindness in some small degree by walking home with us and calling on our father and mother; so, once more getting into our wet boots, off we all started, feeling quite fresh and jolly again. At the gate we met another parson, Mr. P.; and, after standing to chat with him for a few minutes, Mr. R. took him on one side, as he had "a word or two of business to say to him." The business must have been very amusing, for we heard them both laughing very much; and, when they rejoined us, we found they had both determined to accompany us home. I don't think they had a very pleasant walk; for, finding their conversation too tall for us, and silence being slow, we dropped behind and snow-balled them all the way, and

as they stood it without losing their tempers, we rightly concluded they were two rare good fellows.

Our father and mother were half angry, half amused at our behaviour; but, as it led to their making the acquaintance of men they at once liked immensely, we were soon forgiven; and from that day the two parsons were constantly at our house, and were soon looked upon by us all as sincere friends; and, before the year was past, Mr. R. became our brother-in-law.

We were all sitting round the table one morning discussing the post and finishing our breakfast, when the servant came in to say, Mr. R. wished to speak to my father. My elder brother looked knowing and amused, my father rather frightened, and my sister did not seem to hear what was going on, for she hid her face in a letter, and for some time never looked up. It was remarked afterwards that the letter was topsy-turvy, and that she never turned over the sheet, and after a time she walked out of the room with her face still buried in the letter. We boys were called out to hold Mr. R.'s horse; and, finding that he was some time with our father, we led it down the lane; and, fearing no doubt that it might catch cold if kept standing, we took it in turns during a couple of hours to gallop it a quarter of a mile up and down.

At last our brother called us, and said the horse was to be handed over to old Bacon; and then, having nothing to do, we sauntered round the house and cast our eyes into the windows to see how things were going on inside.

On looking into the drawing-room we espied a sight that first made us gasp for breath, and then fired *to red-hot pitch* our fury and indignation. There,

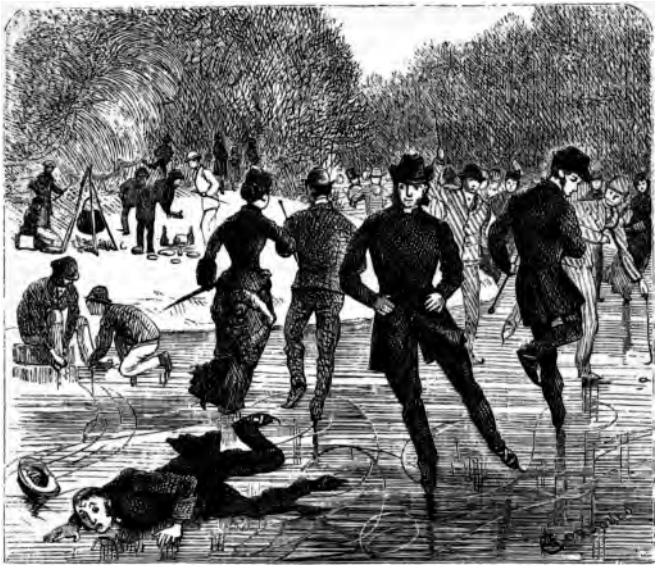
sitting side by side on the sofa, were Mr. R. and my sister; and, yes, our eyes could not deceive us, he had his arm round her waist! What a deceptive villain to dare take such a liberty; and, oh, could we ever call her sister again, after she had allowed such a piece of impertinence! Ought we to rush in and assault him, or should we tell "Jack,"—Jack being our big brother, who, up to this moment, had been looked up to by us as a man of profound wisdom; but then had we not also looked upon our sister as a paragon of discretion? The world seemed to have gone mad, and might not Jack have gone mad like the rest? Yes, the assault was the proper thing; but then Mr. R. was six feet high, and no doubt would be helped in the forthcoming battle by my sister. There was nothing for it, we must tell Jack; and, if he failed us, we would go to our father. Jack was found smoking in the study, and, as we feared, proved quite mad like the rest; for, on our both telling him at once in hurried whispers of the disgraceful sight we had seen, he only blew a cloud of smoke slowly from his mouth, and said, "Look here, youngsters, I will bet you a pound to a brass farthing, it will not be the last time by many that that arm gets into the identical same position." Little by little our eyes became opened; and, though at first we resented the state of affairs, we soon began to think it might have its advantages; and, indeed, were sure it had when Jack said, "Now you had better make yourselves scarce: there will be no lessons to-day; so slip off and have a look for a rat or a rabbit, and I will make it all square with the father." We at once took the hint, in spite of a keen wish to see what an engaged sister would look like; but we felt that rat-catching was too important a work to be laid aside for

such frivolity as courtship, and our sister would not be married before night, when we might examine her at our leisure.

Our sister's marriage, which soon took place, proved quite a godsend to us; for as she went to live only five miles away, and her husband always proved most kind to us boys, we often walked over to see them, and during the holidays we spent some weeks at their house, and from that time quite a new country was opened up to us.

The parish of C——, where they lived, was owned by a nobleman, and his park and woods were all round the rectory, and swarmed with game. The river which ran under the bridge upon which we sat on that, to us, memorable winter's morning, was full of pike, roach, perch and dace, and the big man being most liberal, we spent many a splendid day out, shooting and rabbiting with the keepers, or fishing in the river. Then, close by, was a big shallow lake which was nearly always frozen in winter, and thither flocked, from all the neighbourhood round, all those who could skate, and the clear black ice would be covered with gaily dressed people. There, just behind the island on the very best of the ice, might be seen three or four men, mostly parsons, working indefatigably for hours—some accomplishing the most complicated figures, first on one leg, then on the other; and others eagerly watching them and attempting to do the same, but often only getting some crashing falls for their pains. Then, at the other end of the lake there rushed and swayed a noisy mob, brandishing hockey sticks and tumbling about in the most reckless manner, all eager to get a *hit at the ball* and drive it to the goal, but, just as often

as not, hitting their neighbours' shins instead. On the edge of the island were spread the contents of various hampers, and there seemed no end to the pigeon-pies and hard-boiled eggs, bottled beer and cherry brandy, and from morning till night feasting went on; but the



SKATING.

finest institution of all was a good fire, on which hissed and steamed a monster kettle, from which a never-failing supply of hot tea was made. It was always here that the thickest gathering was to be found, and where the greatest fun and laughter was to be heard. Even the steady-going figurers from the back of the island would condescend, now and again, to join this

merry group and discuss their various exploits over a cup of tea.

During the early days of the frost, sad mishaps would now and then occur. Rash youths, with more foolhardiness than discretion, would go dashing under the boughs of a tree where the ice was yet thin, and find themselves floundering up to their waists in the cold water, and, after plunging and staggering about, crept out only to be laughed at by those who had as yet been more fortunate. As the water was shallow, nothing more serious than a ducking ever happened; and there were good fellows living near who were always ready to help the unfortunates with either a well-warmed bed or a suit of dry clothes. If the frost continued a few days, numberless chair-sledges would make their appearance, and all the ladies of the neighbourhood would come for a ride on the ice; and many a pretty figure and laughing face might be seen skimming over the surface of the lake, pushed along by an admiring and attentive skater. Poor fellows, they were somewhat unfairly treated, for nine times out of ten they pushed a double load,—the little god with the quiver having, unknown to them, found a place in the sledge beside the fair one. The tinkle of the sledge-bells was often followed by the marriage chimes, and I now know several happy couples who glided into matrimony on the ice!

What a curious sensation it was, after a long day's skating, to throw off one's skates and once more stand on the flat soles of one's boots! How one's feet ached and seemed to swell, and what ridiculously short baby-steps one felt constrained to take! Then, in spite of *the pigeon*-pies, hard-boiled eggs, etc., how we did peg

into the "high tea" in the warm dining-room at the rectory, and afterwards loll about on the long hairy mat in the front of the drawing-room fire, feeling just sufficiently tired and stiff to make it enjoyable to do nothing but stare at the blazing logs! Then, when we felt sleep creeping upon us in an overwhelming manner, we would drag our weary limbs off to bed, having first looked out of the back door and put our fingers on the ice in the water-butt to make sure it was not thawing.

There is nothing like a sharp frost to make people sociable; and often after a long day's skating we all separated on the ice, only to meet again at a neighbouring country-house, where we would dance till after midnight, and before leaving would coax some one of the guests into promising to give us just such another dance the following evening.

I remember once, when we were boys, going to stay at a country parsonage, where some dozen other young people also were assembled in order to go to a dance which was to take place at a house about three miles distant. Our host was rather badly off for carriages; so it was settled (we being all tough young country lads and lasses) that the boys should walk with their dancing pumps under their arms, and the girls drive by our sides in two or three open pony carriages. The weather had been bright and frosty; but, on the day in question, toward the middle of the afternoon, the eaves of the house began to drip, and by four o'clock the rain set in with a steady down-pour that looked as if it might last a month! We were all in despair, and at last made up our minds that it was useless to think of going. Just about the time we should all have been dressing *for the dance,* a farmer who lived near, came to speak

to our host on business; and, hearing of our sad disappointment, begged that we might all get dressed as fast as we could, for that he would undertake to drive us to and from the dance safe and dry. It did not take us very long to don our evening attire; and, soon after we were all assembled in the drawing-room, the servant came in to announce "the carriage at the door." Out we flocked, and there found, to our delight and amusement, a great roomy shepherd's hut drawn up to the door, with nice clean straw spread on the floor, and chairs placed round the sides. Four splendid Suffolk punches were attached to it, with two sturdy team-men to guide them.

Off we started; and, though our progress was rather slow, we were not very late, and could boast that, out of more than a hundred guests, we were the only ones that had come in a carriage-and-four!

CHAPTER XI.

THESE DEGENERATE DAYS.—THE GOOD OLD TIMES.—FROZEN ON THE COACH.—WELSH PONIES.—SPOILING A HORSE.—SWEEP AND GREY NELSON.—DONKEY TAKING A BATH.

In our young days we always looked upon a mild open winter as a poor sort of thing, and firmly believed the old saying that "a green Christmas made a fat churchyard;" though, since then, I have become convinced that the word *white* should stand for *green*, and the tell-tale statistics of the Registrar-General, I believe, show I am right. We also believed that the winters were very much more severe in our fathers' and grandfathers' days, and that we were slowly drifting into a wretched foreign sort of climate, neither winter nor summer. We vaguely felt that *someone* (we did not quite know who) was to blame for this—that the someone was young and a radical there was no doubt, and that he was to be avoided, as his society and example were calculated to lead us astray and make us poor effeminate wretches, up to nothing and good for nothing, a burden to ourselves and a disgrace to the rampant British lion.

After listening to the tales told us by our elders,—of coaches being buried in snowdrifts, entire flocks of *sheep lost on* the Wolds, of old women on their way

from market sinking down by the side of a tall fir-tree, the tip of which peeping out of the snow they had fondly supposed to be a short stick, and there remaining for days with nothing to eat but a little brown sugar and a bundle of tallow dips,—how could we doubt that the good old days were over, and that we had come into the world a hundred years or so too late for fun and amusement! Even such queer customers as highwaymen, pirates, and body-snatchers were part of the "good old times;" and there was a ring of regret in the tones that said they were gone to return no more; and old Bacon would sigh as he told us he could remember, as a boy, seeing a gibbet standing at a not far distant four-cross-ways, and that in his father's time a man had been buried at the cross-roads with a stake driven through his body.

Every now and again, Jack Frost would wake up and make an attempt to retrieve his character; but his attempts were considered miserably feeble, and after struggling for days he only succeeded in bringing the thermometer within some few degrees of Zero, and filling the roads with seven or eight feet of snow.

"*This* like the good old Christmases? Lor' bless your young hearts alive, this baint no more like what I can remember, than you are like the men afore my time. We hadn't none of your the-mometies, and nonsense, in them days, but went by the feel of it; and I can just remember a man having both his feet took clean off by the cold, and often and often the royal mail could not get over the road for weeks. Oh, you say the train was stopped in the drift, was it? and a good thing too if it had never got out: it's all along of *those darned trains* a-buzzin' and a-puffin' about, and

the other new-fangled inventions, that things are as they are; and, if I was the Queen, I'd put a stop to 'em all, and then you'd soon see things a-mending and getting a sight better. Why, I mind a goin' to meet your grandfather at the 'Dawg Inn' one night, when he was a-comin' down from Lunnon, and having to stop there till just arter daybreak; 'cos why? four horses, no, nor ten, couldn't drag the coach through the drifts, and they had to wait for the roads to be dug out. Poor old gentleman (least ways he warn't old then, not more than sixty), he was that perished he had to be lifted down; and on the back seat of the coach there sat a poor woman all a-huddled up with summat in her arms. The guard says (him as kept the Swan afterwards, and died of drink) says he, 'Young woman, you get down—now come, look sharp.' She kinder turned her head, sorter dazed like, and old master he says, says he to me, 'Jump up and help that 'ere woman;' so I gets her down, arter a bit, and takes her into the bar, arter master. For more than five minutes she says nothing, but then she comes to, sudden like, and jumps up and shrieks out 'My baby, my baby; oh where is it? don't take it from me; it is all I have left;' and all the time she had it tight in her arms. Master he speaks to her, as perlite as if she had been a born lady, and arter a bit makes her drink a drop of hot beer. Little by little she quiets down, and at last seems to remember she had the kid in her arms, kivered up in an old shawl. She took it close up to the fire, and unwrapped it; and there the poor little crittur was, dead and froze! We expected to hear her begin a-shrieking again, but she was right quiet, only *looked mortal* scared-like; and then, as fast as she

could, she kivered up the child again, and made a bolt for the door, taking the child along with her; but master catches hold of her arm, and with the help of Mrs. Yeoman, the landlady, he gets her upstairs. She never spoke a word; but I feared she might do master a mischief, she looked so savage and queer. Presently, master comes down and says, 'Get off home, Tom, with the gig, and tell your missis I want her here to see after this poor woman as soon as she conveniently can come.' Well, I warn't long a-going home and coming back with missis; and, if you'll believe me, she sat by that poor crittur's side three days and never came home to eat her Christmas dinner along of master, and so he had to partake on it all by hisself. For some weeks, the poor lady (for she turned out to be one, though she had no money) was a bit crazed, and all missis' time was took up with her; but, arter a bit, she got all right and was moved over to the rectory, where she lived till she died, just that very night year that her young one was froze. Folks said it was a broken heart, but I can't think so; for she would allus smile when spoke to; and, in course, it stands to reason one as has a broken heart can't smile. I heerd, years afterwards, that she had married her sweetheart contrary to her father's wishes, and so he wouldn't have no more to do with her—not that the young chap was a bad sort, but 'cos he had no money, and had to work for his bread a-painting pictures. I believe there were such a sight of picture-painters at that time that he couldn't get work, and from want of wittles he took a consumption and died when his little girl was just upon two *months* old, and the poor lady was on her way to ax *her father to take* her home when we happened on her

at the coach. Ah! those were good times, afore folks got dazed by railroads and the like."

It was not only the peasants and ignorant people that thought ill of the railroads, but a bitter hatred was felt for them by many educated men, and even to this day old gentlemen are heard to regret the coaches and post-chaises. I wonder if any of these would quit a first-class carriage on the Great Eastern and mount outside a coach, say at Brandon Station, and take a drive across the great heaths on a winter's night? I should like to know; for, if there were many such, a company might be got up to start a coach, with limited liabilities and a prospect of paying.

In many parishes in the eastern counties there are still large open commons, on which the villagers have the right of feeding their cows, pigs, geese, and donkeys, and the labourers are looked upon as lucky fellows who share in this advantage. The man himself can work as usual for the farmers, and his wife and children "mind" the beasts. Then, besides the profit to be derived from them, the interest he takes in his animals affords a wholesome break to the monotony of the poor fellow's life, and on Sunday afternoons he may be seen leaning over his cottage-gate smoking his cutty-pipe and descanting to a neighbour upon the various merits of his pig or "dickey" (donkey). I fear he may not gain much in hard cash; for he has to pay for his privileges in increased house-rent, and the farmers and other well-to-do people have so many common rights that the poor man's beast comes poorly off and does not thrive much.

Not far from our home was one of these large *commons;* and a clever Welshman, who had a small

farm in the parish, made it a depot three or four times a year for a drove of rough ponies he fetched from Wales, and then sold one by one in the neighbourhood. Mr. Wood made a point of always visiting these droves as soon as they arrived, and generally bought one or two of the best, and after feeding them on his rich meadows for a year, broke them in for saddle and harness, and then sold them at a considerable profit. Being light, active boys, he was glad of our help with these colts, and we were more than glad to give it, and many and many is the long ride and exciting adventure we have had with them. They were often troublesome little beasts, and at first we thought it no disgrace to be pitched over their heads; but when we got stronger and more accustomed to the work, it took a more than ordinarily vicious one to unseat us. It was a grand school for horsemanship, and we took so kindly to our lessons that what we learnt has never been forgotten; though, like other accomplishments, for want of use it has become rusty, and were I now to take to colt breaking, I know I should feel very nervous and get many a fall.

We were soon entrusted with the breaking of these young colts by ourselves, from the catching one in the meadows to driving it quietly in a cart. Now and then we had a mishap, such as being upset in a ditch or over a bank; but we generally got out of the difficulty without much damage, by keeping very quiet, and treating the poor, frightened colt very gently but firmly. Experience has taught me that when a colt takes to kicking or rearing, or what we used to call "putting *on its parts*," it is nine times out of ten owing to the *panic it is in*; and this is increased tenfold by noise or

by the flicking of a whip. If brutality is resorted to, what begins in fear develops into temper; and the young horse is spoilt, if not for life, at all events for a time; and before it becomes a useful beast, perhaps weeks, or months even, of gentle usage will have to be expended on it.

A gentleman who lived near us bought a very handsome young Irish hunter, out of a drove in Marshford market, for £40; and, after giving it a year's run, put it in the hands of a rough rider to break, whose only qualifications were his having plenty of pluck and being able to stick on like a monkey. Trusting to these, the man did not half handle the colt before mounting it, but started at once to "knock all nonsense out of it;" and, by the time it had become accustomed to having a man on its back, it had become what is called a vicious horse, and finished by rearing and "coming over," and in so doing broke the rough rider's thigh. It was then sent to a regular horse-breaker, taking its character with it, and thus ensuring its getting more ill-treatment. This man kept it for a month, and then pronounced it quite unsafe to ride or drive, and the greatest brute he ever had through his hands. The owner, feeling he should never be able to use the horse, sold it to Mr. Wood for £27.

Mr. Wood turned the horse out for six months, hoping that time would help it to forget and forgive its previous ill-treatment, and then began, himself, from the very A B C, to break it over again. For some weeks he led it about every day himself, and would spend hours patting and petting it, and never attempted putting a leg over it until he felt sure the horse had *confidence in him.* He then, without bustle or excite-

ment, got on it, and from that moment was carried quietly and well. He made it quite handy, and a perfect jumper; and, within a year of becoming its owner, he sold it to a master of fox-hounds for £150, who rode it for years, and pronounced it one of the best and most temperate horses he ever possessed.

Besides the Welsh ponies, Mr. Wood nearly always had a young horse in his stable that he was making into a hunter; and when we boys had learnt to stick on and use our hands properly, he would often take us down to the meadows and let us skylark over the hedges and banks, and have a fly or two at the brook, and thus the young ones all got taught, and I only hope the horses enjoyed the fun one quarter as much as we did.

By far the best jumper that Mr. Wood ever had in his stable was "Grey Nelson," a horse that, to our great delight, he was obliged to keep for some years, owing to his always looking ragged and thin, and being unfit to show. He was what is called "a bad doer." He would often refuse his corn after a day's work, and even when he did eat he only got through about half what one of the ponies would.

This horse had a very strong attachment for a little terrier, named "Nettle," one of old Wasp's puppies. It arose in this way.

Before Nettle had got over the follies of his youth, he was one day playing about Mr. Wood's stable-yard while a young horse was being led round. The silly little beast, not knowing, I suppose, that horses sometimes kick, trotted up and took a sniff at his heels, and the next instant was toppled over, with one of its front *legs broken by* a kick. The poor dog hopped into

Grey Nelson's box, which happened to be open and empty, and laid down under the manger. We examined the leg, and, finding it only a simple fracture, made up a flat bed for the dog and left it to take its chance, with Dame Nature as doctor, and the stableman to tend it. The leg did very well, but it was a month before the dog was able to hop about, and in the meantime he and Grey Nelson had established a strong friendship—so strong, indeed, that the always dainty horse now utterly refused to eat a mouthful unless Nettle was in the loose box, and would stand and whinny for hours, with ears pricked forward, listening for the dog to return. It ended in our having to give the dog to the horse; and some years afterwards, when at last the horse was sold to run in a gentleman's carriage, the dog had to be sent to its new home with it. I have often seen the horse lying down with the dog curled up on the top of it; and the groom told me that, whenever the horse laid down, the dog immediately hopped up on its side.

I have several times, since, known horses take a fancy to a particular dog; and, in one case, knew of a horse that hated and would kick at any dog except his own special friend.

Dogs should never be trusted near strange donkeys, for a donkey will generally try to injure a dog if he can; and they are so sudden and quick, and can strike so well with their forelegs as well as kick, that they often succeed in their vicious intentions; and I can remember seeing a little donkey dash into the midst of a pack of hounds and injure three of them, and this without the smallest provocation.

At other times they take the most extraordinary

fright at a dog, and will gallop off with their tails stuck out straight behind and their ears in front, and at the same time roaring forth a bray, with their mouths wide open.

Once, when I was out with a pack of harriers, we were looking for a hare in some meadows near a wide and deep river, over which was a foot-bridge with hand-rails on either side. There was a donkey in the field, which first made an attempt, that nearly proved successful, to trample on a hound, and then galloped off for the bridge in a panic. He had got half-way across, when a hound came on to the bridge from the other side and met him. The donkey attempted to turn round, but was prevented doing so by the hand-rails; so he reared up, and, turning sideways, balanced himself for a moment on his stomach across the rail, and then turned head over heels into the deep river. He soon came to the top again, and started swimming down the river at a most surprising rate, and at last landed some hundred yards below the bridge, and quietly trotted off.

CHAPTER XII.

HORSE *versus* DOG. — STABLE ON FIRE. — RIDING A BULLOCK.— SHOOTING. — OUR FIRST SHOTS.

IT is the fashion always to look on the horse as a very sagacious animal, but surely this can be so only in comparison with such stupid beasts as cows and sheep; for when his intelligence comes to compete with that of the dog, he is nowhere. It is well that it is so; for, were the horse different to what he is, he would not be half so useful to man, and would, with his great strength, be most difficult to manage. I cannot now recall any very striking example of wisdom in a horse, but I can many where he has shewn himself a great fool.

Who, that has ever known much of horses, cannot call to mind some object by the roadside that his horse has shied at for years, and this in spite of having been allowed to examine it over and over again. They get into the most unreasonable panics; and, when in one, will run away and dash themselves to pieces against the side of a house. Let a stable catch fire, and then attempt to save the inmates! They will stand and be burnt to death rather than make a bolt out of the door into the darkness and smoke.

When there is a difficulty in leading a horse out of a burning stable, a good plan is to throw a handful of

common pepper into the horse's eyes. This will effectually blind it for the time, and the horse may be led out actually through the flames.

He will soon recover his sight; but, to stop his sufferings, the eyes should be washed as quickly as possible with some milk, or, better still, with cream, and he will be all right in a minute.

I once saw a stable on fire, in which were two hunters. A new stove had been put up in a harness-room adjoining the stable, and when the groom went home in the evening he left a fire burning in it. The pipes of the stove had not been properly fixed, and so set fire to the floor above through which they passed. The cook, hearing a noise in the stable, went to see what was the matter, and discovered flames coming out of the roof. She at once gave the alarm, but owing to the groom having taken the key home with him it was some time before the door could be forced open, and it was not till the sides of the two loose boxes were on fire. The horse nearest the door was backed out with little difficulty, but the other poor beast refused to stir, and stood and screamed with fright. Fortunately, some man was passing in a cart on the road (it was never known who he was, though enquiries were afterwards made for him), and he came to the rescue. He stripped off a very thick top-coat, and rushing into the stable succeeded in blinding the horse with it, and then led it out, plunging and kicking; but it was so near a thing that the horse was burnt in several places as he passed out. Oddly enough, the horse ran the risk of perishing from cold that same night; for just as the coat was removed from his eyes he gave a violent plunge, and broke loose *from the man* who was holding him. He dashed out of

the gate and away down the road, and was not recovered till the next day, when he was found standing in a lane in a bitter north wind, with his back hunched up, looking most miserable. The night had been very cold and snow had fallen, and the poor horse had been clipped a few days before. He had his clothes on; still it was marvellous that he took no harm, and did not even catch cold.

We boys had acquired such a love of riding under Mr. Wood's tuition, that we longed to mount any animal that would carry us, and I remember a most amusing scene that was brought about by this propensity.

Not having, for a long time, made an attempt to catch the renowned twenty-pound pike under the osier bed, I determined one day to go down to the river and have a fish for him. I had tried to persuade Bob to accompany me, but he preferred remaining behind to ride a pony that had been lent us by a friend for a few days. He volunteered, however, to ride down with my lunch; so about midday he appeared in the meadow, and tying the pony up to a rail, he sauntered along by the river-bank while I fished. Close to the river, a herd of bullocks had laid themselves down to have a quiet chew at the cud, and Bob walked very slowly and quietly up to the largest of them. First he scratched its side with his whip, then he put his knee on its back, then he sat down sideways on it, and the patient beast went on chewing the cud and flapping its ears at the flies.

"Look, Harry, did you ever see such a quiet, sensible beast?"

"No, indeed. Put your leg over his back. I dare say he will let you."

Cautiously Bob stole his leg over its back; but, forgetting he had spurs on, he allowed his heel to turn inwards just as he was fairly seated astride of the beast. In a moment, cud-chewing and fly-flapping was given up; and with one struggle the beast was on its legs, with Bob upon its back; and, with tail up and head

RIDING BULLOCK.

down, off it started in a series of bounds round the meadow. Round and round it went, with Bob clinging on its back and spurs well in its fat sides; and, each time they passed me, Bob cast an imploring glance in my direction, and called out in a pitiable voice, "*Oh-h-h, Harry.*"

It was the most ridiculous sight I ever witnessed, and I nearly expired with laughter; but it was a splendid exhibition of horsemanship (or rather oxmanship !), for not only did Bob ride his beast, but he rode it till it dropped ; and then, instead of falling, he quietly slipped off the panting and exhausted creature, apparently as fresh as when he mounted, though a little paler.

He was furious with me for laughing at him, and seemed to think I was somehow to blame; so, mounting the pony, he rode off, leaving me to return home on foot and carry the lunch-basket.

After riding, and the various amusements connected with it, such as hunting and coursing, comes shooting, in a country boy's life; but, as it is ten times more dangerous than riding, a boy should not be allowed to carry a *loaded* gun till he is some years older than when he began to ride. I say *loaded*, for I think it is a good plan to allow a boy to carry an *un*loaded gun on every possible occasion, provided he has someone with him who is well accustomed to the dangerous weapon and will take the trouble to instruct him how to handle it. Before a gun is taken out, filled with concentrated essence of death and destruction, it should have become an extra limb to him that carries it, and it can only become so by constant handling. Some fathers have so much fear of a gun that they will not let their boys touch one till they are young men. I do not think this is a good plan ; as then, when they do begin to shoot, they will be as awkward as a cow with a wooden leg, and at the same time will think themselves too old to be taught how to use it, or take patiently the snubs they are sure to deserve from their elders for their carelessness.

We began to get familiar with guns very early in life. There was an old crippled flint-lock in the house, without either trigger or hammers; and as we were allowed to have this as a plaything we got over the A B C of shooting before we were out of the nursery.

We were taught by our father, mother, and brother, to consider a gun as sacred, and one of the greatest crimes we could commit was to touch one unless it was put into our hands after being discharged; and even then we got a box on the ear if we either intentionally or by accident pointed the barrels at anyone.

From the time we could toddle, one of our greatest treats was to trot over the fields behind my father or brother when they were shooting; and thus we early learnt such useful lessons as putting a gun on half-cock, never getting over a gate or hedge in front of one, the proper position in which to stand it when loading, and never to put one down when done with without first firing it off. Even when every precaution is taken, a gun is a dangerous thing; and he is a fortunate man who, constantly using a gun, yet gets through life without an accident. I confess I have not; for, three times, a gun has gone off in my hands when I did not intend it; but, thanks to the habits of carefulness I had acquired as a boy, the barrels were pointed well up in the air and so did no harm except on the last occasion. I was then out for a day's shooting in a wild foreign country; and the first thing that got up was a hare, but being in thick scrub, I only got a snap-shot and did not see if I had killed. I walked up to the spot where I had last *seen the hare,* looked about for it unsucessfully for a *minute or two,* and then proceeded to load. I placed the

butt-end of the gun between my feet, with the hammers *from* me, poured the first charge from a full flask down the barrel, and then proceeded to ram down the wad. Just as it reached the powder off went the gun sending the ramrod far away from between my fingers, the front one of which it cut in a ghastly manner, and at the same time my whole hand was burnt and the skin filled with powder, a few grains of which I shall carry to the grave with me. Fortunately, no bones were broken, and in a few weeks my finger got well; but I shall never forget the scare it gave me.

As soon as I could, I took the breech out of the gun and there discovered the cause of the mishap. It was very much honeycombed, and a little piece of tow had been left jammed in when the gun was cleaned; this had doubtless caught fire at the first discharge and held a spark until the powder was forced upon it by the wad, and had then ignited the charge. I cannot understand why it did not go off when the powder was first poured in, and I am thankful, indeed, that it did not, as the flask was large and quite full of powder, and the consequences must have been disastrous: had I even not been killed, this hand would not now be running my pen over the paper.

I at once smashed up the old gun, and have since always shot with a breechloader; which, in my opinion, reduces the danger of shooting to one half.

The first thing I ever shot was a yellow-hammer sitting on the top of a larch tree in the garden. My brother had been out shooting, and on his way home he loaded the gun for me with a reduced charge; and, espying the unfortunate little bird, I took a shot at it, *and to my* great joy brought it down, but got such a

kick from the gun myself that I was somewhat afraid to repeat the performance.

Bob beat me, out and out, with his first shot, for he killed two partridges. He discovered a fine covey one afternoon scratching about under a wheat-stack, and ran in to tell my father about them; who, to his delight, said, "Well, you shall have a shot at them."

He loaded the gun, and instructed Bob to creep up to a bank that commanded the stack. He did so; and, resting the gun on a rail, fired, and rolled over two birds and himself too; for the recoil was so great, owing to the gun being held loosely, that he could not stand against it. I was very jealous of Bob's success, and spent months peeping about the premises for some game to shoot at. At last I found a hare sitting on a bank, and getting the gun loaded by my father, took a shot at it from about five yards distant, and made a hole through it as big as my fist!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER.—A CRIMEAN GOAT IN A FIX.—OCTOBER SHOOTING.—SNIPE SHOOTING.—SUSPENDED OVER A BROOK.—A RIDICULOUS MISTAKE.

LONG before the 1st of September, we boys used to be in a state of feverish excitement, and would roam over the fields, day after day, till we became intimately acquainted with every covey of birds, and could tell within a very few how many we had on our ground, and where they were oftenest to be found. We looked after the brushing of all the fields ourselves, and had a constant dread that someone might run a net over them, and this we did for years before we carried a gun ourselves.

My elder brother, who was a first-rate shot and thorough sportsman, always came to us for the months of September and October; and we put off our summer holidays till then, so that we might be able to devote ourselves to him as gamekeepers and beaters. There was little sleep for either of us during the night before the 1st of September; and we were always up and about with game-bags, &c., prepared, long before the chief actor could be induced to quit his bed; for he used *to say that* no good was gained by disturbing the birds

before 10 o'clock. and that the bag was made between midday and 3 p.m.

Breakfast over, away we go. The big brother first, we boys next, and old Bacon with the bags last, whilst a brace of capital Irish setters caper and dance around us. We boys are half sick from excitement, and wonder how the brother can walk along so deliberately, smoking his pipe and talking to us and the dogs.

At last we come to the field, a nice deep wheat stubble, where we know there are three or four coveys. A word or two of caution to steady the excited dogs, and then away they go, one in one direction, one in the other, with the gun behind them, and one of us on either side of it armed with a good ash-stick to beat with.

How delicious the stubble smells, and how it sparkles and glistens in the rays of the sun, and what thousands of cobwebs are afloat on the fresh morning air.

Swish, swish, go our feet through the damp stubble, and pitter-pat go our hearts as we press on, our eyes glancing everywhere and taking in, half unconsciously, the beauties of the lovely morning, the working of the dogs, and the thousand and one other sights, all more or less delightful to us.

"Have a care there, Bounce, have a care," and the dog comes to a stand with Bell backing; but to our disgust it is only a lark, and as soon as it is on the wing away slip the dogs again, feeling and showing that they are very much ashamed.

Burr, burr, there they go, ten of them!

Bell has gone headlong into their midst, and spoilt *the first shot!* but it is the first range on the first

morning, and doubtless she will recover her last year's perfect form as soon as she is settled to her work. At all events she has not given chase, but drops at once, looking back at us, as much as to say, "I couldn't help it, there was not a puff of scent."

"Hold up, old lady, but have a care, so-ho"—Bounce has them in the corner; yes, and a nice covey of fine birds they are; they rise well, and two fall to the bang, bang, of the gun, one in the field but the other into the middle of the hedge, and before it is secured we boys have scratched hands and a few thorns in our legs.

All the birds have "gone right" and we shall find them either in the standing seeds or in the bracken and gorse on the bankside yonder.

On we go, from stubble to stubble, getting shots in almost all, and the two dogs, working better and better in each field. Then we come to a field of turnips where shot follows quickly on shot, and ere we have beaten it, we have to empty our wallets into Bacon's game-bag and hand over a big hare for him to carry. We now leave the seeds and bracken for a bit: there is no fear of the birds moving, after the dusting they have had; so we will just run over the meadows and the oat-stubble beyond, and so on into the far end of the bank and work our birds back again, by which means we shall get them scattered and pick them up one at a time. The bank proves, as usual, far the best shooting of the whole day; the two dogs work splendidly, and we boys fairly well, after being rated once or twice for making too much noise. How close the birds lie in the short thick tufts, and what pretty shots they give as they rise and fly out over the open, and with what *thumps* they come down!

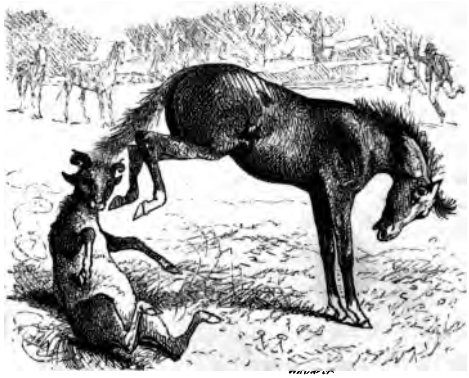
Two or three snipe are also picked up in the soft places at the lowside, and more than one rabbit is shot, besides one Bob nobbles with his stick. By the time we get through this bit of wild ground, two brace of wounded birds are known to be left behind; so, giving a whistle, we call up a small boy who has been holding Pepper and Wasp in a chain, and tell him to "let loose the little ones and chain up the setters," and away we go quartering the ground closely, and we succeed in finding one and a half brace, and, besides doing so, we shoot another bird that had been passed in a thick gorse-bush, and also some more rabbits.

But here come the girls with the lunch-basket. Can it ever be so late? Yes, I suppose it is, for I feel very peckish, so let us fall to at once, but first how about the bag, Bacon? Three brace of birds, and a hare, gone home; five brace of birds, a couple of snipe, and a brace of rabbits, here—well, not so bad; but look sharp, girls, and unpack the lunch, we have no time to lose; and at it we go, and eat and stuff as if our lives depended on the rate we stowed away a given quantity. We are not long at lunch—not nearly as long as the girls would have liked us to be, but quite long enough to develop a little stiffness and make us go (as old Bacon says) "wonderful feelin' like" for the first half-mile.

The sport in the afternoon proves as good as that of the morning. More single birds are shot, and the dogs and boys work more steadily; and at last we all reach home tired out, leaving in all directions the poor parent birds collecting their dispersed broods with their well-known cry, "che weep, che weep."

On one of these 1st of September mornings, I saw a

very curious thing. I had grown many years older ; and, with a gun under my arm, was walking with a friend to our shooting ground. Passing by a meadow, we saw three or four young colts, standing just inside the gate ; and caught fast by its horns to the long tail of one of them, was a venerable old goat that had been born on the heights of Alma, and was brought to England from the Crimea by the captain of a transport.



GOAT IN A FIX.

On examination we found that the poor beast was so entangled he could not get free, and as his nose could not reach the ground he looked half-starved, and very miserable. Taking a sharp knife in my hand, I attempted to steal up behind the colt and cut the poor goat free; and I had nearly succeeded in so doing, when the colt caught sight of me, and started off down the field, dragging its victim after it. The poor thing was

swung about in every direction, now on its back, now on its legs for a moment; and the more it struggled the faster went the colt, every now and then kicking out and sending the goat, feet upwards, into the air. We felt sure it must be killed; but no, after going twice round the field, a violent kick from the colt gave the goat such a jerk, that it tore the hair by which it was held from the colt's tail, and it was free. The next moment it was eating the grass as fast as it could, and apparently quite unhurt.

The first of September, from being the first of the shooting, is the day most looked forward to; but I believe there is more real sport and unalloyed enjoyment to be had about the middle of October, provided your beat has not been unduly worked before. The heat in September is often excesssive, and almost too much for both men and dogs. You may get more partridges then than later, but they are often mere babies, and are killed far too easily; and, then however big the pheasants are, you may not fill up your bag with them. No, give me, for sport, a fine day about the middle of October. Let the leaves be all turning brown, and let there have been a sharp hoar-frost in the early morning, which has left just sufficient sting in the air to make a boy glad to tuck his ground-ash under his arm, and his hands into his pockets, as he walks off briskly by the side of the sportsman.

We will go, if you please, to ground where no keeper has ever trod, but where the farmer, helped by every man on his land, has looked after the game. Do not expect any hot corners; probably there are not forty pheasants on the whole beat, and you will not see half *of them, for,* there being no coverts, they are scattered

all over the place. All the rush and wildness have been taken out of Bell and Bounce during the previous month, and they will now work steadily all the morning and will not much mind being sent home when Pepper and Wasp take their places at lunch-time to hunt the hedges and old marl-pits. The pheasants, as many as are found, will rise close to your feet; but you must expect to see many a covey of birds rise far out of shot, and you must relinquish all hope of getting near them till the first snow, when you may thin them a bit out of the rough hedges. Never mind, their place in the bag will be taken by a brace of wild duck from the osier bed, a few snipe, more hares and rabbits, and some good natural pheasants.

You will have to walk faster and perhaps further than you did on the first of September; but owing to the weather being cooler, and you in better condition, you will come home as fresh as you went out; and when you come to eating the partridges you have killed, you will not think they can belong to the same family as the poor tasteless squeakers you shot on the first of September.

Boys, I know, hate advice, and as I am writing for them I will not give any, for fear they should chuck the book on one side and say, "I would as soon read a lesson book." I will only say this: I believe nine bags out of ten are reduced by *talking*. There is nothing game fears so much as the human voice. One thing more: I don't know a good shot who brings his gun *up* to his bird; all the best sportsmen I know bring it *down*. Again, if I had to bet on two guns, I should back the man who *stood back* on his right leg when firing, and not the one who *leant forward* on the left. This is

simply *my* opinion, founded on my experience, and it may not be worth much; but it costs nothing to give it, and you boys are quite welcome to it. If you do not think as I do, follow your own plan, and I wish you good sport and good fun with all my heart. There are exceptions to all rules, and I must make mine at driving partridges and shooting at rocketers. I do then bring up my gun, and, when I am well on, I jerk it forward a yard or so and fire.

One night, towards the end of November, we got the welcome news that there were "a sight of snipe on the Mashes," and so we determined to make a raid on them the next day, and as there was a parson living near us who was a good shot and a capital fellow, we asked him to join us with his old Joe Manton.

We were up early, and, after a good breakfast, started off in the dog cart for a drive of twenty miles with the parson's old red retriever tucked in under the seat. The morning was quite perfect for snipe-shooting, though rather colder than was pleasant for so long a drive, but it got warmer as we went on, and we anticipated a splendid day's shooting.

The "Mash" (as the fens are called in the eastern counties) that we were going to, was not a very wet one, and here and there along the sides we got a nice piece of rough ground covered with gorse bushes in which were a few partridges and hares; and through the middle of the low-land ran a deep quiet brook about fifteen feet wide, on either bank of which was a row of old willows.

On reaching our destination, we had put our horse into the rectory stable; and, after taking a snack of *bread and cheese* and a glass of beer, we started off for

the marsh; but before going upon, or rather into it, we took an hour's quick walk over a few old stubbles and through the gorse to look for a partridge, and to raise our blood to the proper temperature for facing the icy-cold water.

The partridges we saw were all too wild to get near, but we succeeded in bagging a couple of mallard out of an old pond and three or four hares; but the sport of the day was "down below," so hardening our hearts, splash we went into the first bit of squashy ground.

"Tweet, tweet," away goes a snipe, and missing with the first barrel, Mr. B., (the parson) brings it down with the second; and Bob, who is his marker fixes his eyes on the spot where it falls and never takes them off till he picks up the beautiful gamey-looking little bird. On we go, getting a shot every few minutes; but, as we are walking up wind, the birds are difficult to kill and the bags do not get very heavy.

We work our way steadily down the left-hand side of the brook, sending most of the birds that escape to some lovely soft ground on the other side where we shall find them later on. After about two hours we reach the end of our marsh, so look about for a means of getting over the brook. There is no bridge, and the brook is too wide for any of us to jump.

"Oh, here you have it: by making a little spring up over the water, one can easily catch hold of that bough and swing up to the tree and so over." So saying, our big brother, suiting the action to the word, was quickly on the other side and ready to catch the guns as we tossed them across to him.

Mr. B. looks somewhat doubtingly at the bough, but,

having seen how easily it could be done, soon makes his spring, and firmly catches hold of it.

"Swing your legs up, man, what are you hanging there for?"

It was all very well to tell him what to do, but another thing for him to do it. He struggled, he kicked, he gasped, he hollowed, and finally stiffened himself out! Little by little his fingers gave way and flop he went into the water over head and ears, and when he came to the top again we boys pulled him out looking more dead than alive.

He cast what would have been a look of scorn, if his hair had not dripped so much, towards us boys as we stood screaming with laughter; and then marched off to the rectory, where we found him some hours later rigged out in his host's best Sunday clothes, smoking his pipe very happily over the study fire.

We boys managed without much difficulty to swing ourselves over the brook and then began the real sport of the day. Eight couple of snipe fell to the first eighteen shots, and in the next three hours we had sixteen couple bagged.

There is, in my opinion, no bird more difficult to kill than a snipe if flushed *up* wind, and none easier if flushed *down* wind. All this day the snipe came "surprisin' gain" (as the parson's old groom, gamekeeper, clerk, and factotum said). They rose singly, and did not fly off the ground when missed or not shot at. When they are "ongain," they get up in wisps (flocks), nearly always out of shot, and go off, goodness only knows where, and you see no more of *them*!

As I have said above, Mr. B. is a good fellow, and,

being so, I am sure he will forgive my mentioning another mishap he had though under different circumstances. About half a mile from his rectory lived a squire who was much given to good cheer and who liked to share his dinner and bottle with a friend, and so it came to pass that the rector was constantly asked to dine with him.

The rectory and the hall were so near together that it was not worth taking out "the pony;" so Mr. B. used to walk carrying his evening shoes and a pair of black silk socks in his pocket, which he changed for his walking ones in the Squire's study, on his arrival and return. Now, on these occasions, his best Sunday coat served also for evening wear.

One fine warm Sunday morning, when his church was unusually full, he ascended his pulpit, and, before he began his sermon hitched up his gown behind and fished out his handkerchief, and whilst he took a look round on his serious and attentive flock, prepared to blow a sounding blast. What was his astonishment to see the entire congregation first looked surprised, then grin, and finally duck their heads down out of sight. With handkerchief held out, and fire flashing from his usually mild and expressive blue eyes, he regarded them for a moment; but then, moving his hand to his nose to blow this time a note of indignation, his eye chanced to fall on the handkerchief, and then his ireful countenance was suffused with blushes, for he discovered that he was flourishing about a pair of black silk stockings with white toes and tops! He sat down and hid his face behind the cushion, and cast the odious stockings under the seat; and it was some time before he had mustered up courage enough to face his mirth-

ful flock. The lads and lasses who behaved in such an indecorous manner that Sunday morning have grown into men and women, but I am glad to say that Parson B. is as fresh as ever, and so is the tale of his silk stockings.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRUTAL OUTRAGE.—JUST RETRIBUTION.—A TRAGEDY.

WHEN I was about fourteen years old I received an invitation from my godfather, a clergyman in "the shires," to pay him a visit; and my father, thinking that an outing would expand my mind and do me good, allowed me to accept it.

Whilst on this visit, an event occurred in the neighbourhood that made a great sensation, and so impressed me that I believe I can now write down the account as I heard it.

The whole of the land in several parishes near that in which my godfather lived, belonged to a very great man, who rarely came near the property, and left the entire management of his estates to his agent; who was received by the gentlemen of the district as an equal on account of his good birth, but was liked by few, as he was a big, blustering, self-satisfied fellow, who, if a red nose and bloated lips did not belie him, must have been given to a too frequent use of something stronger than water.

The game on the estates had never been strictly preserved; but, just before my visit, the owner of the property gave the shooting to the agent, who at once

devoted all his spare energy to getting up a large head, and notice-boards appeared in all directions warning off trespassers.

About the middle of the summer, a small house in the parish was hired for six months by a quiet ladylike person of the name of Ward, who was accompanied by her son, a lad of about twenty years old.

My godfather, as rector of the parish, called on her at once, and learnt that she was a widow with this only son whom she literally worshipped; and that she had taken the house on his account, as he was a great invalid, and the London doctors had prescribed country air and gentle but regular exercise. My godfather took a great liking to young Ward, and it was through him that he was given the shooting over a large farm that adjoined, but did not belong to the big estate.

The lad was shown one part of the farm, but was not strong enough to "beat the boundaries;" and so he was told that if he only went into fields into which there was a gate, he would not be trespassing. Unfortunately he received no caution not to pass through hunting gates, which were placed in different parts of the boundary hedge; and so, on the third or fourth day that he was out, he quite unwittingly trespassed on the agent's shooting, and actually shot at a partridge, but did not kill it.

The agent was on the look-out, and soon came stalking up to him, and with a string of oaths began abusing him. Young Ward showed at once how the mistake had arisen, but by his cool quiet behaviour so infuriated the agent that he lost all command of himself, and struck him with a hunting-whip he carried *in his hand.* The poor lad was no match for him, but

he had the true English pluck; and so, laying down his gun, attempted to return the blows, but it only led to his being beaten in a most brutal manner. At last he was allowed to escape, and more dead than alive he arrived at his mother's door, and soon had to go to his bed, from which he never moved again. The shock to his sensitive nature, combined with the actual injuries he had received, frustrated all that the most untiring and attentive nursing and doctoring could do for him; and at last he quietly died, having first made his mother promise she would not prosecute the brutal agent, and also sending him a note in which he said he forgave as he hoped to be forgiven.

The poor mother left the house and neighbourhood directly after the funeral, and to this day I have never heard anything further of her.

The sad affair was not to end here; for though the poor mother was prevented by her promise (even if she had wished it) from punishing the bully, others were not so deterred; and, amongst those who had known young Ward and learnt to like him for his pleasant courteous manners, was a young farmer who lived near. He was never heard to express an opinion on the conduct of the agent; but, when it was discussed before him, his lips would tremble and a dangerous look overspread his face. A few days after the funeral, the agent, passing through the village, came face to face with this man, who was carrying a heavy jockey-whip. Some words passed between them; but only the last ones the farmer said were heard by the lookers on, and they were, "You are a foul-mouthed bully, and brutally flogged a poor lad to death; and now I am going to flog you within an inch of it for doing so: take that, and

that." As fast as hail came down the cutting blows, now on the shoulders, now on the outspread hands and arms, now across the face; till, amid howls for mercy, the bully fell to the ground; and yet, as long as that powerful arm could swing the whip, the blows continued.

Before the thrashing was over, there were groups of villagers looking on, yet no hand was held up to stop the punishment; and I believe it would have been the same had they thought he was to be flogged to death. From this time, no one in the place, except his servants, ever saw the agent's face; and they reported that it was not nice to look at, as there was a wide blue scar across his left cheek where a cut from the whip had taken effect.

The landlord, hearing of what had occurred, sent the agent about his business; and I believe he afterwards drank himself to death, to the last blustering, swearing, and threatening vengeance against the young farmer who had meted out to him, if not legal, at all events just and richly merited, punishment.

Whilst I was yet very young, a tragedy, for such it appeared to my juvenile mind, occurred near my home; the horrors of which made such an impression on me that I can now recall all the circumstances accurately, and could point out the exact spot where it took place. Nearly all the land in our parish, and in the adjoining one, belonged to a great country Squire. *Great*, I suppose, because he was rich, and ruled with a rod of iron over some score of farmers and hundreds of poor peasants. I never heard that he was great in any other way; but, on the contrary, he had the reputation of being a sulky, morose, old curmudgeon, who never *gave bite or sip* to a neighbour, and lived alone in the

big house without a friend to speak to. I believe there had been a time when he had possessed a pack of harriers, and had been fond of shooting; but he had kept the former sport as much as possible to himself, and was never known to ask a friend to join him in the latter. At the time I am writing of, this old man was almost entirely confined to the house, but he continued strictly to preserve, and allowed nothing to interfere with or disturb, the game of all sorts that swarmed all over the estate. His gamekeepers were rewarded for every verdict that was given against a poacher; and, if report spoke truly, they and their numerous creatures had a happy knack of trumping up cases, and swearing false evidence against anyone towards whom they had a grudge. Besides this, they were encouraged to spy upon the farmers; and one tenant, I know, was threatened with a notice to quit his farm, because his son, a small boy, ran along on the top of the bank by the public road-side, on his way from school. It was supposed that he might disturb a sacred pheasant or partridge on its nest. The only person who was allowed to fire a gun on the estate, was old Legg, the head keeper; and up to this time he was the factotum of the old Squire, who used to boast that Legg was the best keeper, the best company, and the most truthful man in the county. Legg persuaded the Squire to allow the farmers to keep a brace of greyhounds each, and once or twice a year there was a great coursing meeting on the property, at which Legg always netted a nice round sum out of the hat "which went round for the keeper;" besides, he got a good drink at every farm to which the coursing took him.

Near my home there was a freehold belonging to a

small proprietor, on which were built a few labourer's cottages, in which often lived men who had been turned out of the big man's houses. As these cottages, and the land they stood on, were surrounded by the large estate and the Squire could not bully the occupants, they were a very "Naboth's vineyard" to him; and old Legg had orders to keep a sharp look-out on the people that lived in them. The first of these cottages was occupied by a drover; a quiet steady man, who did a good trade before the railways drove him and his beasts off the road. To help him, he always kept a stock dog; and at this time he had an unusually handsome and clever beast, that he had brought from the highlands of Scotland, when he had been up there for a drove of bullocks. The drover chanced to be at home on one of the great coursing days; and, with all those who could manage it, he went to have a look at the sport, but before starting he tied his dog up to its kennel. During the afternoon the dog managed to break loose; and, with part of the chain dangling from his collar, trotted off down the road to have a look for his master. The poor beast had not gone far, when he met old Legg; who, thinking there was no one near, deliberately shot him; and then, first taking off and pocketing the collar and chain, he threw the dog through the hedge into the ditch on the other side. Unfortunately for Legg, there were two women working in the field close by, who had heard the dog dragging the chain on the road, then the firing of the gun, followed by one loud howl. Directly Legg had marched off, they crept up and there found and recognised the poor *dog*. That evening, the drover and the two women *called on my* father, who, as Parson of the Parish, was

general adviser; and when he had heard the case he promised to take the matter up and do his best for the poor man. Accordingly, next morning, he rang at the door of the big house, and, when told by the servant that "Mr. —— never seed no one," he replied that he could take no refusal as his business was important. A few minutes later he was shown in, and found the old man furious at what he considered a great intrusion. My father soon explained matters; and then, without saying a word, Mr. —— rang the bell and told the servant to send up the gamekeeper. When he appeared, Mr. —— asked my father to repeat the case, and then asked Legg what he had to say.

"Say, sir? well, it is all as clear as the sun. The drover is a poaching blackguard, as you know, sir; his dog weren't worth hanging, so he just shot it, and with the help of this here parson and the two women, invented these lies."

Mr. —— then said, "Look here, Legg, I don't care a farthing whether or not you shot the dog, but I do want to know who did it; if you shot it, say so at once, and leave the consequences to me."

"Now, sir, I will take my oath I did not shoot the dog; and, what is more, I have not set eyes on him all the week."

Mr. —— then turned to my father: "You hear what Legg says; you may take my word for it, he speaks the truth; he never lied in his life, and even if he had, he would not do so to me."

My father now said: "If I prove to you, Mr. ——, that Legg shot the dog, and has now on his oath told you a lie, what would you do?" "Prove it," he answered, "and I will do this: I have left Legg, in my will, a

pension of £60 a year; if he has lied to me, he shall not have a shilling."

My father now told Legg to empty all his pockets. The man turned livid; but, when the order was repeated by his master, he began to obey, taking care, though, not to show that he had two large pockets on the inside of his coat. My father drew attention to this; so Mr. —— ordered the man to bring the coat to him. He tried his best, by bluster and begging, to get off doing this; but the squire was firm, and on receiving the coat put his hand into the inside pocket, and drew forth the collar and chain. He said, quite calmly: "You may go, Legg; you will never hear from me nor speak to me on this subject whilst I live, but when I am dead you will know that *I* am not a liar; and may I ask you, Mr. B., to give this £5 for me to the drover, and ask him to accept it in payment for the dog; and I thank you for opening my eyes."

The drover accepted the money, and so the affair ended, as far as he was concerned; but, when the old Squire died, it was found he had revoked his legacy to Legg, and, the tale getting told about, he found it impossible to get other employment as keeper; and, after dragging on at odd jobs for some years, he finished his days in the workhouse.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WEASEL.—A POLECAT AT THE DECOY.—MOUSE-HUNTER AND HAWK.—A TRAP FOR A BOY.—HANDED OVER TO JUSTICE.—PARDONED.—PHEASANT SHOT IN SEPTEMBER.

I BELIEVE that the weasel is the boldest, the cleverest, and yet perhaps one of the least known animals in England. If any clever naturalist would take the trouble to collect and piece together well-authenticated stories of these animals, from the little mouse-hunter to the polecat, I am sure we might have a most interesting history, and learn to look with some degree of respect on a creature that is generally considered the worst sort of vermin. As my boyhood was spent in a game country, I had little chance of becoming on friendly terms with the larger sort of weasel; but I saw a fair number of the indestructible little mouse-hunter, and have had many a long and generally unsuccessful hunt after him.

Either the weasel has very little scent, or else he smells so like a ferret that dogs, accustomed to the latter (as every dog I have possessed has been), are unable to distinguish between them; for I have invariably found that the very best dogs, on other vermin, are unable to hunt up to a weasel or mouse-hunter, and it has always been more by good luck than good

management if I have killed them with dogs. Then a mouse-hunter is the quickest beast, for its size, that I know; and it is up to so many dodges, from slipping down a mole's hole in light soil to climbing up a tree when on heavy soil, that they are pretty sure to make their escape. The trap and gun are the best means for killing them. The former should be "figure of four" traps, not the steel ones, as they are too brutal for anything.

The mouse-hunters are such bold little fellows that they will dart across a road or path within a few feet of you. Should you have a gun with you, stand still and imitate with your lips the squeak of a rat or mouse, and in half a minute, if you look sharp, you will see a tiny little red head with two piercing black eyes peering out of the bottom of the hedge. Stand quite motionless and go on squeaking, and the mouse-hunter will come quite up to your feet, trusting to his quickness and activity to make his escape. Poor little lad, he has yet to learn that shot travel even faster than he does, and in learning this lesson he may lose his life.

I have myself at different times seen some very curious things done by these mouse-hunters, and others as remarkable have been told me by men whose veracity was beyond doubt.

One day, during winter, I was riding down what in Norfolk is called a "loke," that is, a grassy cross-country lane, when I heard from the other side of the hedge the peculiar short squeak of a weasel, evidently some way out in the field. I rode quietly up to the gate; and, about ten yards from the hedge and perhaps thirty from the gate where I stood, I saw a mouse-

hunter evidently killing something. I watched it for a few moments, and at last saw it was digging its teeth into its victim, and knew the deed was done. I got off my horse; and, opening the gate, crept slowly towards the spot and had reached within a few yards of it before the little beast saw me. It made a bolt to the hedge; and, though I made a dash at it, it was too quick for me. I then looked for the victim, and to my astonishment found it was another female mouse-hunter. It was bitten behind the ear, and was just dead when I picked it up. It was a clear case of murder; or, perhaps, as it was out in the open, so far from the hedge, it was an arranged meeting, an affair of honour!

The following account was given me by a clergyman a year or two since; and I will repeat it as it was told me, at the same time hoping he will excuse me for doing so.

In the parish where Mr. —— was rector, there was a celebrated decoy; and he was very fond of walking down to it, and watching, from a place where he could not be seen, the habits of the different kinds of water-fowl. He was astonished one day to see a lot of teal suddenly begin poking out their necks towards the shore; and, uttering notes of anger, swim in the direction to which their necks pointed. Mr. —— turned his eyes to the little beach and there saw the cause of the disturbance. It was a very large polecat, that was rolling about and toppling over just at the water's edge. The teal swam nearer and nearer, and the polecat went on playing the mountebank, till the stupid birds were within six feet of the shore; when, like lightning, it darted at the nearest one and pitched on its back; but, before it could

fix its fangs in the fatal spot, the teal dived and the polecat had to swim ashore, baffled in its murderous attempt; but it at once recommenced its toppling, until again the birds came within reach and it made another spring, but unsuccessfully. I suppose it found the water cold, or thought the teal had had sufficient warning; for it now scuttled off into the wood, and was no more seen.

I pity the poor animal that gets the fangs of even the little mouse-hunter into its flesh, for I know how deep they enter and what pain they give. After hunting a weasel one day, with the dogs, up and down a hedge for a long while, Bob saw it dart into a mole's hole which ran out into the field, and we set to work to unearth it. It was hard work to keep the hole, for it branched off in every direction, so at last we lost it. I knelt down and poked with my fingers in the soft ground; and, when least expecting it, pushed my hand through some loose earth into the hole and in a moment the mouse-hunter had sent his teeth through my finger-nail down to the bone. In snatching back my hand, I pulled out the little animal and flung him well out into the field, and before he reached the hedge Wasp had him.

I have some misgivings about telling the following anecdote, as I believe I have seen it in print before; but, as my old friend Mr. Wood *saw* what took place and is still alive to vouch for the truth, I give it here and risk being called a copyist. One day, Mr. Wood was in a field of fresh mown-barley, when he saw a hawk hovering for some time over the same spot, and at last come down like a stone and immediately rise with something in its claws. It flew slowly and with

difficulty, but at last attained a considerable height; when suddenly it gave a convulsive struggle, and came tumbling to the ground by the side of its intended victim. They both fell near Mr. Wood, who ran quickly to the spot and was just in time to see a small mouse-hunter scuttle beneath the swaths of the barley on

WEASEL AND HAWK.

which it had fallen. He picked up the hawk, just as it gave its last kick; and, on examining it, he found it had been bitten through the neck just above the breast. I have no doubt that hawks have often made the same mistake.

I have myself twice seen a mouse-hunter fixed hard

and fast to the neck of a rabbit, and have each time profited by the incident; as, when he had done the butcher, I did customer and bagged the rabbit.

I have written of trapping birds and beasts, and now I will tell of a trap set for a boy and what a narrow escape I had from being caught.

Two kind but rather fussy maiden ladies had asked us boys to stay with them; and, as a change of any sort is always delightful to boys, we accepted it, and were soon lodged in a snug country-house about twenty miles from our home. Our kind hostesses had, I fancy, very little notion of what boys were like; for, before we had been there half a day in the house, we were made to change our boots and socks twice over, for fear of wet feet; and first one and then the other of the poor creatures was run off her legs in attempting to follow us about, to see that we got into no harm; and we afterwards heard that they were racked with doubt as to the advisability of seeing us take our baths, as they could not believe it possible we could properly wash ourselves. Then, poor dears, they did not get a wink of sleep the first night, owing to the discovery that Bob had forgotten to pack up a night-gown. Either of theirs would have fitted us, but they were quite out of the question; for, oh shocking! they were frilled. Bob settled the difficulty by taking the case off the bolster and getting into it, tail first; a proceeding so outrageous that, to prevent its happening again, the poor ladies bought some calico the next day and made Bob a new night-gown!

As soon as we were awake of a morning, we began to *be "looked after;"* for first one sister and then the *other kept* coming to our door with some such fidget as

the following: "Boys, dears, I just came to remind you to put on clean shirts this morning;" or, "Mind you wash well, you will find a new flannel in the soap-dish; and, pray excuse me, do use plenty of soap and rub yourselves quite dry; and, above all, say your prayers and clean your teeth." All breakfast time we were questioned as to what we ate at home, for fear we should get hold of something that would not suit our delicate stomachs; and, when at last we did get out of doors, we were implored not to go on the grass for fear of the damp. By the third day we were nearly bursting with suppressed animal spirits; and, as we saw the two old ladies drive off in the pony-chaise to call on a sick friend, we determined to break out violently.

There were no dogs, no ferrets, no cricket, nor any other amusement to keep us at home; so we started for a long walk. For about a mile we kept to the road; then, seeing a path to the left over a stile, we took it, and with eyes eagerly seeking for something to "break out" upon, we followed it over a brook, through a spinney swarming with game which made our fingers tingle to get at it, then across a meadow up to a stile. Just as we came up to this stile, we discovered a fine cock-pheasant, crouched in the grass on the other side; and, oh how wonderfully lucky, here on the post is half a brick!

In a moment, whiz went the brick with so true an aim that the poor bird fell over dead, and I hopped over the stile to pick it up, and had just time to discover that there was a string from its legs to a peg in the ground, when I heard some one close behind me say, "Now I have you, you outdacious young

warmint," and, at the same moment, Bob shouting, "Bolt, Harry, bolt."

The keeper had set this trap, and then concealed himself in the ditch close by; and, when I picked up the bird, he was so near me that the idea of my escaping never entered his head. Not so with me, however; for, the first surprise over, I made a dart and was back over the stile, and some yards away on the other side before he moved, but then, relieving himself of a few cumbersome oaths, he set off in pursuit of me. I soon discovered that he had the legs of me in a flat race; so, quitting the foot-path, I turned it into a steeple chase, and being quick at my fences I could hold my own, and at a flight of hurdles gained quite a hundred yards by jumping them, whilst my heavy pursuer had to stop and open them. He had nearly got hold of me at the brook; but, by jumping the hedge that ran along the side of it, and coming down splash in a deep hole on the other side, I made good my escape for a time, for the keeper turned aside and made for a bridge at the end of the field. When I first dragged myself out of the water, I could hardly jog, from the weight of my dripping clothes; and so the keeper again got into the same field with me. At each yard my clothes got lighter, and (I suspect) the keeper's wind shorter; for, after maintaining our respective distances for a field or two, he shut up, and as he did so expended his last available gasp in an oath that did me no harm.

I kept on running till I at last saw the old ladies' house not far off, and Bob anxiously watching me from the gate. We slipped into the hay-house, and as soon as I could get my wind, we had a hearty laugh over our

escapade, and then determined if possible to keep the whole affair from the old ladies; but "man proposes," etc. I was still in my wet clothes when I heard the pony-carriage drive up to the door, and the next minute half a dozen people were all shouting our names at once.

Bob went forward, and soon returned to tell me that "the cat was out of the bag," and that I might as well show myself. It appeared that, just as I went over the hedge into the brook, the ladies were passing and saw me do it, and had quite made up their minds that I was drowned, as, the hedge being between me and them, they did not see me crawl out. They were so overjoyed to see me alive, that they both cried quite as much as would have been decent had I been drowned, and did not scold in the least, but contented themselves with ordering me off to bed; and, when they had got me there, they treated me to all sorts of hot possets to keep away colds, which I liked, and also to a perfect Sunday of sermons on the consequences of evil doing, which I did *not* like.

The next morning I was all right and well, and by the time breakfast was over, had quite forgotten about my late scrape, and, like a good fellow, had quite forgiven myself. But not so the ladies; for, in a most serious and impressive manner, they told me that by the advice of the Parson, whom they had consulted overnight, they had written to the owner of the property where I had killed the pheasant and told him all, and that we boys were to go over with the letter, and make a humble apology for our awful misdoings. If they had asked me to give the keeper another chance across country, or to have jumped into the brook ten times, I should have welcomed it in preference to this cold-

management if I have killed them with dogs. Then a mouse-hunter is the quickest beast, for its size, that I know; and it is up to so many dodges, from slipping down a mole's hole in light soil to climbing up a tree when on heavy soil, that they are pretty sure to make their escape. The trap and gun are the best means for killing them. The former should be "figure of four" traps, not the steel ones, as they are too brutal for anything.

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I have myself at different times seen some very curious things done by these mouse-hunters, and others as remarkable have been told me by men whose veracity was beyond doubt.

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you come from? Did you get to the bottom of the brook when you popped in? So the keeper shirked the jump, as might be supposed! What did the good ladies say? did they whip you? Well, I must see into this, but I have no time now, come this way." And he led us out of the room and out of the house, and pointed to a gate on the far side of a big park, and told us to go through that, follow a path we should find till we came to a cottage, and leave word there that the man who lived in it was to be at the hall by two o'clock. "Then come back here," he added, "and I will see what I am to do with two such desperate characters."

Somehow he did not look very awful as he despatched us, and we felt our spirits returning and intuitively knew the worst was over. We were a little startled, but not frightened again, when the owner of the cottage turned out to be the very keeper who had set the trap; and we were even amused by his look of astonishment when he recognised us.

When we got back to the Hall, the Squire met us at the door, and taking us into his study said: "Now, boys, you may make yourselves quite happy, for, do you know, I don't think you are much to blame. The trap set for you was more than boy-nature could resist, and I am very angry and vexed that a keeper of mine should have done such a mean thing as to tempt you or any one else to break the law. Come into lunch now, and when we have finished you shall hear what I have to say to the man on the subject."

In the dining room we were welcomed by a bright pretty lady, the wife of the squire, who evidently had heard the account of our misdoings, for she began at

once to banter us on the subject, and after she had told us she liked boys and had two great big ones of her own then reading for the army, we became great friends, and our tongues wagged so fast it was a wonder we found time to eat the huge lunch we did.

Old vinegar visage, our coachman, was sent off alone with a message that the Squire's lady would bring us home, later, in her pony-carriage. The only cloud on the otherwise bright happy afternoon was the scolding the poor ignorant keeper got; so I shall pass that over and jump on to the drive home, which to us boys was a perfect climax of happiness. The lady declared she was a wretched driver, and could not make her pony go; so we took it in turns to be her coachman, and, what between the stodgy beast wanting to stop or turn in at every cottage or gate, running away down all the little hills and pretending he could not drag us up the others, we had as much as we could do; but we were cheered and encouraged by the jokes and laughter of our companion, and by the time we reached our temporary home had both fallen head over heels in love with her. The astonishment of the two old maiden ladies when they saw us drive up to the door laughing and talking, was ludicrous to behold; and, for some time they could not treat us otherwise than still in disgrace, and I believe they thought our new friend nearly as bad as we were, when she said, in answer to some remarks about her husband's kindness in letting us off so easily, "Oh! bother the pheasant; do you know if I had been in the boys' place I am sure I should have had a shot at it with the brick. They quite deserve the bird for themselves, for so cleverly shaking off that great lubberly keeper; but, as it may have been spoilt by the brick, I

have brought you two others, which I hope you will accept in settlement of this affair."

I have never since that day regretted shying the brick, as it led to my making friends with the good old Squire and his wife, and many a happy day we afterwards spent under their hospitable roof.

Many a poor pheasant has come to trouble through man's agency, but men also have sometimes got into difficulties through a pheasant, as the following anecdote will show. A sporting Farmer was out shooting towards the end of September; and, just before leaving off for the day, a hen-pheasant got up at his feet and in a moment he knocked it over and bagged it. Some one, who either owed him a grudge or was anxious to make his neighbour keep within the law, saw him do it, and had him summoned before the magistrates. The farmer's landlord was on the bench, and, not wishing his tenant to be punished, he put to him this rather leading question. "I suppose Mr. —— you mistook this hen pheasant for a partridge when you fired?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"Oh, well then" (looking vexed), "there is nothing for it, you must pay the fine of one pound."

"All right, Squire, here is the money; I would any day rather pay a pound than confess myself such an ass as not to know the difference between a pheasant and a partridge."

CHAPTER XVI.

FOOLISH PRACTICAL JOKING.—MY DREADFUL TAIL.—THE GLEBE-FARM.—LITTLE MARY.—LITTLE MARY'S LOVERS.—LITTLE MARY'S HUSBAND.—GETTING INTO DIFFICULTIES.—CRUSHED TO DEATH.

PRACTICAL joking is so often followed by disastrous consequences that I think it should be always avoided; or, if indulged in, care and forethought should be taken that it may lead to no mischief. There is neither wisdom nor wit in many of the foolish old jokes; such as dressing up as a ghost, setting a heavy basin full of flour on the top of a partially open door to fall on the head of the first person that opens it and perhaps half kill him, drawing back a chair as some one is about to sit down on it, or filling a friend's boots full of water as they stand at his bedroom door. If no actual bodily harm be done by them, yet none of these tricks are calculated to improve the victim's temper, and I confess that I should myself be apt to turn up very rusty if these things were done to me.

To this day however I cannot help laughing when I recall a practical joke that was played in a country house where I was staying as a boy. There was to be a grand ball in the neighbourhood, and every room and bed in the house had its occupants; and, when all were full, our hostess had a note from a young lady, who lived

a long way off, to say she wished very much to go to the ball and begging to be taken in for the night. There was no time to write and explain difficulties, so on the day of the ball the lady appeared. The state of the case was explained to her and she was also told that another of the guests had kindly offered to share her bed with her.

Miss C—— (the new comer) did not look best pleased at the prospect, but she soon brightened up and said she was sure they should manage very well. That night, when the ladies retired to their rooms, Miss C—— was discovered by her companion to be in great distress. She sat in a dark corner, and every now and then a stifled sob broke from her lips; and, on being asked what was the matter, she would only say, "Oh, it is too awful—I wish I had not come, how stupid of me; now you will find me out." The other lady was most kind, and most anxious to comfort her; and, so, after a little, Miss C—— falteringly said, "Why, I am a poor afflicted creature—I have a horrid long hairy tail like a cat's! I know you will not now let me sleep with you."

Her companion was not very young, and prided herself on being very strong-minded; so she said, "Hoity toity, stuff and nonsense! jump into bed, and keep your tail, which I believe is a *tale,* to yourself—you won't humbug me!" Miss C—— heaved a sigh, and keeping well in the corner, undressed and got into bed; where she was soon joined by her companion, and both being tired by the late dancing were soon asleep.

After a while, the strong-minded lady awoke to find something tickling her; she put down her hand—and in a moment she was out of bed; for she had grasped a most unmistakably hairy tail, which quietly withdrew

itself as she took hold of it! Miss C—— now awoke; and, asking what was the matter, was greeted with "Oh your tail—your horrid tail;" to which she rejoined "Oh my tail, my dreadful tail! Are you frightened, my dear? It won't hurt you, I am sure it won't hurt you; so do come back to bed again"—but no, ropes and cart-horses could not drag the scared one back; so snatching a blanket from the bed, she composed herself to rest in the arm chair, leaving Miss C—— in undivided possession of the bed. The next morning, when further questioned on the subject, Miss C—— calmly said, "Oh yes, it is quite true I have a tail, and I will tell you about it. When I was a small child I got into the habit of sleeping with this to nurse as a dolly, and now I can't sleep without it;" and, so saying, she drew forth from the bedclothes an old boa—one of those hairy rope-like things our mothers used to put round their throats to keep them warm. That night, Miss C—— had to put up with sleeping two in a bed; for her companion was not to be frightened again, now she knew the tail was not a fixture!

Part of my father's income, as rector of the parish, was derived from a pretty little glebe-farm, on which was a neat old-fashioned farmhouse, surrounded with small but well-arranged buildings. All was let, years before I could remember, to a man named John Ashmeade, one of the most respectable men in the parish, a great friend with us boys, and the admiration of all, both high and low, for his handsome face and figure. Wonderful to say, for once the parson's glebe was well done by and gave the landlord no trouble. I say, wonderful; for generally the glebe, however good the land may be, is wretchedly farmed, and the tenant

a ne'er-do-weel, who devotes his time and energy, not to extracting the natural fruits from the soil, but to humbugging the parson, and getting, year after year, some or all his rent forgiven on some such plea as the death of a cow or a horse. He and his farm are a thorn in the flesh, to the poor parson; and rent day, instead of being looked forward to, is dreaded like a calamity. The fact is, parsons have other and more important things to look after; and, from this, and from their previous life, are unfitted for the duties of a landlord. Yes, the glebe for once was well done by; though you will see that, later on, it became a source of trouble to my father, and he would gladly have put up with the loss of it if the calamities it indirectly brought could have been got rid of with it.

Early in life, John Ashmeade had secured a bride well worthy of so good a husband, both in looks and character; and for the next ten years they made life one long honeymoon, and the only trouble they had was being without a child; not that Mary ever allowed that this was a trouble, for on the contrary she was used to say, "Children? Lor', I don't want no children, a-troubling me. I have as much as I can do looking after my old man; and other folk's young ones give me enough trouble, goodness knows." If it was trouble they gave, she spoke truly; for she was rarely to be seen without some little toddling thing hanging to her skirts, or perched up on her back; but, from the wistful way she would look at these "troubles" when she thought no one saw her, and the hugs and kisses she gave them, people were inclined to doubt the truth of the assertion that she did not want one of her own; and when at last one did come, the neighbours said she and the old man

"behaved right fulish-like about the little mawther" (girl).

For years, John used to say, and say truly, that the only thing he and his missus had failed in doing, when they both together tried hard to accomplish it, was the spoiling of the child; for she grew from year to year prettier and prettier, and nicer and nicer, and I look back with such pleasure to the picture the glebe-farm and its occupants presented in those days that if I don't take care I shall fill the remainder of these pages with them and their doings to the exclusion of other matters more directly connected with my boy life. Suffice it to say, then, that from the time "little Mary" (as she was always called to distinguish her from her mother) was born till she reached the age of eighteen and had become the prettiest girl for miles round, she was a universal favourite, and even the tongues of would-be rivals to her good looks, had nothing but good to say of her.

By this time lovers of all ages and all sorts were a drug in that market, and old John used to chaff his wife and tell her she had just learnt to brew good beer, for in years gone by the young fellows didn't want to be for ever dropping in to have a chat and taste the tap. Little Mary was quite aware of the state of affairs, but, as she did not care for any of them except as old friends and companions, she treated them all alike, and sadly squandered her favours; at least, so said Dick Gardner, who was the most desperate of the lot, and the one that all the parish, except those in the race with him, hoped might win. His old father, with whom he lived, had retired from business as a farmer, *after* making (so folks said) "a pretty penny," and Dick

was his declared heir; but the comfort in which he lived, and the prospects before him only urged him on to work, and early and late he was to be seen superintending the management of a large estate for which he was the agent. Then Dick worked for work's sake, in a great measure; for he was a generous, free-handed fellow, and was ever ready to put his hand to his pocket to serve a friend or reward a service.

At this time, if "little Mary" would have allowed it, he would have drained that said pocket to buy her love-tokens; but he had to content himself with supplying her with flowers begged from the old gardener at the big house.

Besides being a good fellow and a general favourite, he was, for a young man, as good looking as John Ashmeade was for an old one; and it was thought "mighty strange" that little Mary did not accept him as a sweetheart. Over and over again, Dick pressed his suit, and was backed up by old Ashmeade and his wife; but it only ended in his making Mary cry, and his being told she was very, very sorry for him, and liked him best of all her friends, but that she did not care for him as a wife should. He took his disappointment quietly, and kept his troubles to himself; but he hoped on, and made up his mind to marry Mary or no one.

Matters were in this state when a large farm in the next parish was taken by a smart dashing young farmer of the name of Lawrence, who came from the other side of the county; where he had lived an idle life under his father's roof, spending his days in amateur horse-dealing and his nights at the billiard-table. It was said that he had seen "a sight of life," was a rare hand at a bargain, and could ride harder

than anyone for miles round; but was cruelly hard on a horse, and he boasted that he would either kill or cure a restive animal if it fell into his hands, and that he *had* killed one poor beast by a blow behind the ear from his hunting-whip.

He was, undoubtedly, a good-looking fellow; but his was a hard, cruel sort of beauty that would repulse a child and make honest men cautious in his company. Strange as it may appear, he had not been three months at the farm before he was constantly to be seen on his "blood hoss," riding to and from the Ashmeades; and, stranger still, before the year was out "little Mary" was Mrs. Lawrence. Poor child! she had taken the fatal step with her eyes open, for my father joined her own people in trying to dissuade her, but she was trapped by that handsome face, and by the voluble, flattering tongue. She was desperately in love, and so threw herself away on the most good-for-nothing blackguard within the bounds of the county. All went well for a little while, and Mary might often be seen sitting beside her husband in a high dog-cart, drawn by a wicked rat-tailed screw, dashing along at the rate of fifteen miles an hour; and she would tell her mother and friends that she was the happiest woman in England, and had the kindest and most attentive husband. I hope she spoke the truth—I am sure she thought she did, but there was a new look in her face that had never been there before, and that look was fear. She had only been married three weeks, and was just returned from Yarmouth, where they had been for their honeymoon; when, whilst taking a drive with her husband, the vicious rat-tail shied and bolted. Lawrence apparently took no notice of it, but went on quietly

whistling, and poor Mary got in such a fright that she made a clutch at the reins. In an instant, Lawrence dropped his hold, and said, with an oath, "Oh, you will, will you? Two cannot drive one horse, so I give up." The road, fortunately, was wide and straight, and free from vehicles; and Mary, accustomed to driving, sat quite still, only entreating her husband to excuse her and resume the reins; but the brute refused, and never put out a hand till Mary pulled up the horse on a steep hill, and in doing so fainted away.

Such tales of Lawrence and his wife began to be rife in the country, and then others more ominous began to circulate.

Mary, though unwell, was much alone. Lawrence was constantly in the billiard-room at the market town. He had dropped a large sum of money at cards at a neighbouring horse-dealer's. He was often brought home drunk. The favourite for the local steeple-chases was found dead in its box, and the crippled cobbler who lived opposite said he *believed* it was Lawrence he saw in the yard at midnight; and he had his head cracked open a few nights afterwards by a blow from an unseen hand as he was putting up his shutter. Then poor old John Ashmeade was one night grossly insulted at Lawrence's house whilst sitting at tea with his daughter. Money, which had at first been plentiful, then became scarce; and Mary, for the first time in her life, began to dread Christmas bills. Her fresh pretty girlish looks soon began to disappear, and a frightened careworn expression took their place. Two poor sickly babies were born, but mercifully only lived a few weeks; and Mary, though broken-hearted at their loss, did not wish them back with her. The old folks at home aged

rapidly, and it was noticed that many of the little comforts they had indulged in were given up, and that this was always done after a visit from the son-in-law. He drained them of all their savings, which were foolishly given as a bribe to make him kinder to the daughter. He might have had their heart's blood if he had bid for it with the same offer! The old man worked harder than ever on the farm, but at Michaelmas the rent was not forthcoming for the first time in thirty years. Dick Gardner used to step in nearly every evening and have a chat with the poor old couple, but the name of the Lawrences was never mentioned between them.

Time wore on, but things went from bad to worse, and at last Lawrence's landlord, disgusted at the way the farm was neglected, gave him notice to quit. Then followed a sale, and the few comforts and household gods with which Mary had surrounded herself, were swallowed up in its capacious jaws. For six months after this they lived in lodgings in the neighbouring town, and Lawrence spent his time in loafing about the stable-yard of a disreputable horse-dealer, and drinking in pot-houses. His good looks left him, and in his face were depicted drunkenness, debauchery, and brutality. After this, through the influence of old Ashmeade, and by his giving a bill of sale on all his goods as security for the rent, a small farm of fifty acres was taken in the parish for the Lawrences, and they moved into it. Though the house was only a cottage Mary had the satisfaction of being near her fast failing father and mother, and as her wretched husband continued to spend most of his time in the local town she could be constantly with them. So things went

on for a year or two, but at last one night John Ashmeade saw a sight that killed him. It had often happened before, but the patient, long-suffering wife had borne it in silence. John saw Lawrence brutally strike his daughter with a cutting whip. He saw the cruel lash descend and the great blood-red wheal follow the blow, and the once powerful man was now too feeble to protect his darling. From that night old John never left his bed and hardly ever spoke, but would lie for hours holding his old wife's hand and watching his daughter with eyes that were too sorrowful for tears. Before the last came he partially lost consciousness, and appeared to think the plans he had so fondly hoped for were accomplished, and that his daughter was married to Dick Gardner, for just before he died, while they were all standing round his bed, he made Dick swear that he would always be kind to and protect little Mary. Poor Dick, how his heart ached, and how he longed that he had the right to do so, and fervently he swore to follow the wishes of the dying man to the best of his power. The old wife was soon after laid beside the old man in their last resting-place, and the old home was filled with new faces.

Dick, of course, was undoubtedly *wrong*, but, in my opinion, he took the only effectual steps to fulfil the wishes of the dying father; he stopped Lawrence on the high road and gave him such a flogging, he had to keep his bed a week, and promised him another if he dared lay a finger on his wife again.

And now my father's difficulties began. He and my mother had felt deeply the ill-treatment of poor Mary, and longed to be able to alleviate her troubles. The Glebe farm was to let, and Lawrence applied for it, using

threats of further brutality towards his wife if he did not get it. He even made Mary ask for it, but she was a poor supplicant and saw clearly that it was impossible for my father as a clergyman to have dealings with such a blackguard.

After he was refused he would often stop my father, and would say, "If Mary looks ill and unhappy you know who is to blame; she *has* rough times, but they will be harder yet."

My readers will say, was there no law in the land to protect her? Yes, there was law, but are there not hundreds of poor women who will go on suffering and suffering, and though pressed by their friends to do so will never seek that protection? The feelings of women, and the very best of women are a sealed book to us men.

Lawrence utterly neglected his land, but spent his time in a kind of horse dealing. He would buy up poor broken-down screws that could hardly move, and then by brutally flogging and tormenting them make them shamble along as if they had yet a little work left in them, and so induce someone to buy them at a few shillings profit just before they died of starvation and cruelty. Others he would buy for their vice, which he soon reduced by giving them no water for days, and then driving them till they nearly dropped. He became possessed of a horse that no one could manage either in the stable or on the road, and he even had a hard struggle to conquer it, and when he thought the devilry had been quite knocked out of it, he would find it was but hidden for a time. He would often ride the horse to some public-house, tie it up to a gate or railing, and then go into the bar and challenge the

people he might find there to lay hand on the animal. Now and then someone, who was either half-drunk or fancied he could manage it, would make the attempt, and, taking the bet, cautiously approach the horse, which never for a moment took its eyes off him, and when he thought the man was within reach would kick

WOULD YE ?

and strike with both hind and fore legs, and no one was able to touch him. Then Lawrence would swagger out, and the horse on seeing him would tremble all over and allow him to do what he liked.

A happy deliverance for all connected with this

human fiend at last arrived through this horse, for one day, after tormenting and striking it in a most cruel way at the door of a country pot-house, he proceeded to mount it. He was more than half drunk, so had lost his usual activity, and the horse, I dare say, feeling this, reared up the moment he put his leg over it, and fell backwards, crushing in his rider's chest under the pommel of the saddle; then as the man rose to his knees in a last death struggle, the horse turned and kicked him full in the face with fearful force, and Lawrence was gone, and his brutalities to man and beast were over.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HARRIERS. — THE STAGHOUNDS. — "LOR', MA, HERE'S THE DICKEY!"

I BELIEVE there is no part of England where men are fonder of a good horse or are better riders than in the eastern counties, and this is strange as there are but few packs of hounds, and the noble fox has to make way for the half-tame pheasant. One reason for this may be that the landlords nearly always keep the right of shooting over the farms, and so the farmers are driven to coursing, and all the hunting they can get for recreation. Most of the best hunters and hacks are owned by farmers, and the squire contents himself when he cannot shoot with a drive in his wife's "cruelty van," or a jolting on his shooting pony.

Fortunately for us boys, within a short distance of our home was one of the most celebrated packs of harriers in all England, and certainly one of the best hunted, and whenever we could get a mount on any description of beast we were off to them. The fields were never very large, often not exceeding twenty horsemen, but we all knew each other well, and the long looks for a hare gave ample time for a joke, and when we were on the farm of some good-tempered fellow who did not mind a broken hurdle or a gap,

we young ones would drop behind and do a little "larking."

A new horse in the field was always an excitement, but the greatest fun was to be had when someone would bring a young horse "to make," especially if the rider had sufficient pluck to put him at a big place and also dare brave the laugh his mishaps brought upon him.

"Well, Joe, so you are on another young 'un, eh? Going to make him, I suppose?"

As Joe hopes in the course of the day to sell "the young 'un" to a timid though sporting parson, he does not like him to be so openly criticised, and besides, the horse did perform wonderfully well when quietly tried yesterday over the farm, so he rejoins, "He don't want much making, he is about perfect." "He may be, but what makes him want to go backwards at his jumps? I likes 'em to go head fust. A little trifle hot I expect? Ride him at the water there, if he gets in it will cool him, but p'r'aps you feel kinder timid-like yourself?"

"Not I," answers Joe, and away he goes, feet shoved home, hands down, and a hard look in his face. Away rushes "the young 'un," with head up, and legs flying all over the field, and finally jumping yards too soon comes down in the stagnant drain, sending Joe cleverly over his head. He is up in a minute, and pulls at the reins, but after one or two struggles the horse lies still, half in and half out of the water. Then follows a volley of some such remarks as this, from the steady-going old fogies whose larking days are among things of the past.

"*There 'bore*, you must be a fule; whatever made

you go and do that? Why you might ha' known the hoss wouldn't do it. Well he's spoilt, poor rogue, his back's broke without doubt. You'd better save the saddle and bridle, they'll clean and do again, but the hoss——" (The horse having got his wind a little, now gives a violent plunge and struggles to land). "Well to be sure! I made sartain his back was gone. You'll find him strained, but he may get round and be useful in harness. What will you take for him now? —he'd do on the farm."

"All right," says Joe, "I'll think about it, and if you and your old gig hoss get safely over the boundary, will let you know on the other side." Old fogie's face falls somewhat at being thus reminded there is no gate out of the field; he looks round to see if there is no other way, but seeing none, he waits till nearly all the field have gone over one place, and then taking comfort in the fact that his cob is celebrated for "stanching" his banks (or rather was when young Crowder, the butcher, had him), he slowly and carefully approaches the spot. He does not much like the look of it, the bank is far too high and narrow, and the "holl" (ditch) too wide and deep, but half the field is watching him, and he has yet sufficient of his old pluck left to prefer risking a fall to braving the chaff. So with a dig of the spurs and a "come up, Brandy," he and his horse struggle to the top of the bank, and after renewed spur action and many more "come ups," the "stancher" makes a feeble jump, and drops his hind legs into a ditch seven feet deep, and covered with brambles. The horse struggles and kicks, and just as his rider rolls off into the field, it slips quietly down into the ditch and falls over on its back.

"Well done, old fellow!" cries out Joe; "as you were so kind when I was in the water just now, I don't mind lending you my shut knife to cut his throat, and I'll lend you a hand to flay the old cripple, he ain't worth getting out alive, so look sharp, and then you can buy the young one. He'll do for you, for you won't ever want him to jump water. Oh, you are going to dig him out, are you? You had better by half dig him *in*, and have done with him."

Later on in the day "the young one" gets his head down and his legs more together, and swings over some clashing big places, and so the parson becomes its owner, feeling sure that the only thing that has kept him from going quite straight for the last ten years was, his bad luck in always getting a horse that would not jump. Even old fogey, as the day wears on, and after he has imbibed about half a bottle of "sherry wine" at a friend's house, gets his cob over a ditch or two, and finally returns home well satisfied with himself.

With all this larking and joking there is no noise, for all know that the Squire "can't abide it," and though he is never abusive to his field, yet will "cut up rough" if a shout or a noise makes his hounds lift up their heads.

The country I am writing of was a very big one, and about the hardest I ever rode over. The fields were small, nearly all ploughed, and divided by thick stub hedges on narrow banks, and a ditch often eight or nine feet deep and ten wide. "The Squire" would take his hounds out whenever a horse could get over the ground, for he said the hunting season was quite short enough without wasting a day, and so we often began after a frost, before it was all out of the ground,

and I remember being out one day when, owing to this, every soul but two got a fall, and some of the hard riders had two or three; but though I was constantly out with these hounds for some years, I am glad to say I never saw any one badly hurt.

Then there was a pack of stag-hounds that met near us now and then, and when they did so we looked on it quite as a duty to put in an appearance. If we had a horse, so much the better, but lacking that we would put up with a ground ash, and many is the tiring run we had, feeling glad if we got a glimpse now and then of the distant hunt, and as proud as kings if we were up at the take. I am doubtful now whether we got as much fun out of these staggers as we did from the harriers, for if the run was a good one, it proved twenty-five per cent. too fast for us if mounted, and seventy-five per cent. if on foot; but there was ever so much more *glory* in the staggers than the harriers, and if we missed the run, we at least had great excitement at the meet.

A favourite place with the master for uncarting a stag was Beacon Heath, and whenever he did so we boys were sure to be at the appointed spot about an hour before anyone else, and so inspected every man and beast as they came on to the ground. "My Lady" was there from the Hall, sitting with "My Lord" on the box, he keenly enjoying the sight, but having been in his day a first flight man in the shires, he deems it the proper thing to pooh pooh staggers. The master of the harriers, on his cover hack, trots up with his little girl, and they intend seeing all they can of the run from roads and friendly lanes, and as he knows every inch of the country, he will be able to say before

the end of the day who rode straightest, who most cunningly, and whose heart failed him at the sight of the brook in the meadows. The country doctor is there on his "warmint-looking" little beast, and should one of the first flight come to grief and require his services, he won't be long in coming. Ah, there I see is the high church curate peeping round that peat stack, with a stout pair of navvy boots on, and a stick under his arm, and from the nervous way he every now and then presses his wide-awake down on his head and gives a chuckle, I will bet a penny he also sees the brook negotiated. Carriages of all sorts, dog carts, tax carts, butchers' carts, pony carts, and donkey carts are drawn up in a line, and everyone, old and young, for miles round are here, eagerly watching the distant corner of the heath for the deer cart. Just as it appears, up dashes a drag armed with officers from the garrison town. Down they tumble, and mounting their horses, trot about chatting with their friends, and as they are all in pink, they add to the brightness of the scene. Both they and their horses look like going, but so do those two straight-legged, lissome men who stand a little apart, critically eyeing all who arrive, and mentally noting those who are likely to push them hard in the run. They are unmistakably brothers, though perhaps there may be some ten or twelve years difference in their age. They are mounted on quiet-looking horses, well bred, and in the highest condition. Both riders and horses are well known, and have long been the envy of all the hardest riders, for as yet they have never been beaten, though over and over again some young farmer or hard riding "sodger" has done his best to cut them down. They soon become

the centre of a group of horsemen, who will most of them be well up at the finish, or, at any rate, but a little way behind.

Meantime, the master of the hounds has been trotting on his powerful old hunter, from carriage to cart and cart to carriage, exchanging a friendly joke with all, till the young ones, both men and horses, are becoming very impatient, and wonder what he is waiting for. He is a sharp old fellow, and knows that not one of the many people he chats with will ever object to his running over their land, and he goes on till he has settled for two or three fresh meets.

At last the deer cart is brought to the front and wheeled round, and the next moment a well-known old buck hops out, and after standing for a full minute gazing round with a look of scorn, quietly trots off followed by a yapping cur who snaps at his heels, and the next moment rolls over, with his jaw nearly broken and a great gash in his shoulder, inflicted by a kick from that slender leg and foot. At this a shout is raised by the bystanders, and the stag, taking fright, goes away at a gallop, across the heath, over the hedge at the far end, and now all eyes are turned to look for the coming pack. But what a change has taken place! The quiet expectant crowd has turned into a disorderly mob. Men and boys of all classes rush about in all directions. Carriage horses plunge, ponies in carts rear and kick, dogs bark, and women scream, and, oh, for shame! more than two-thirds of the horsemen are galloping off, some to the right, some to the left, but at right angles to the course the stag has taken. They are the "knowing ones" who have made up their minds which way the stag is to go, or else are putting their trust in

some well-known leader, and they will go clattering up and down the roads for the next two hours, and most of them will finally settle down in some "pot-house," and sit and sot for hours.

Just as they are starting, the hard-faced, neat little huntsman comes dashing up with his eager pack at his heels, and cleverly threading their way through and past all obstacles, and, hitting off the scent, away they go at an astonishing pace. For the next ten minutes there is no fear of overriding the hounds, and by the end of that time the brook will be crossed, and the field refined down to the very best men—men who have done it before and will do it again, and know all the time what they are about.

Before the heath is past, the two brothers are, as usual, a little way in front, and riding side by side at a pace that would be reckless if they did not know their horses; they clear the big gate at the low end, followed by the huntsman and the doctor, but the others, fearing to face timber at the pace they are going, take the hedge with the big ditch beside it, and, with a few exceptions, all are over.

On the day I have in my mind, the stag went as straight as a line for twelve miles, never for a hundred yards "doing road work," and only once halting in its swinging gallop to take a swim through a pond to refresh itself.

One by one the hardest of the riders and the best of the horses give up, and at the last only the huntsman and one of the two brothers (who, by the bye, were large millers in the neighbourhood) were on the line, and even they lost sight of the few hounds that were on with the stag.

On arriving at a small farm-house, and seeing the good lady standing at the door in evidently a state of great agitation, the huntsman pulled up and asked if she had seen the stag, to which she replied, "Yes, that I have. Now just you look here. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for letting out such a beast to come scaring of quiet folk out of their life. Well, there, keep quiet, ain't I just a telling you? Me and my darter was a sitting in the parley a having of our dinner, when she looks up, and says, says she, 'Lor', ma, here's the dickey' (donkey), and I looks round and see'd the nasty breute (brute) had harns (horns). It kinder imitated to come at me, so I shruck out, and me and Jemima rushed for our lives out through the wash-house, leaving the breute to eat up all the wittles, which no doubt but what he's doing now." In a moment the huntsman was off his horse, and, followed by Mr. Smith, his only companion, dashed into the house, down a long passage, at the end of which was a window, and into a room on the left, where they found the stag at bay, and, better still, a fine leg of boiled pork on the table, flanked by a jug of frothing home-brewed. Remembering what the farmer's wife had said about the stag eating "the wittles," the huntsman winked at his companion, and then sitting down at table, and keeping meanwhile one eye on the threatening stag, he cut himself about half a pound of fat pork, which, together with a boiled potato, he swallowed in a moment, and then, seizing the jug, tossed down the contents.

The stag was driven into the passage, and the huntsman, having gone on in front, called to Mr. Smith to stand by the window to prevent it dashing out that

way while he ran out to shut up the hounds. For the first time that day Mr. Smith felt nervous. The stag turns round and faces him, and then, with its head lowered and a little on one side, slowly approaches, evidently with the intention of going through or over him out of the window. Fortunately, half way down the

THE MEET.

passage there stood close to the wall an old-fashioned eight-day clock, and just as the stag approaches it, it strikes one. The stag casts its eyes up to its face, and then, supposing he had found a fresh tormentor, goes *at it head* foremost, and then retreats to prepare for *another butt*; but as the clock stands its ground man-

fully, the stag begins to get frightened, and so backs to the far end of the passage, and Mr. Smith feels saved.

One by one stragglers ride up, and after a bit the stag is safely secured, and shut up in an out-house to await the deer cart. From that day the old lady has firmly believed the beast ate her pork and drank the beer!

It is the fashion to call stag-hunting "cocktail sport," and to sneer at it as calf-hunting, but I have noticed that all the men with good nerve who ride forward, enjoy the fun and say it is good sport, and those who abuse it are roadsters!

It may be like calf-hunting, but never having ridden after one I can't offer an opinion. If calves give anything like the runs that stags do, I, for one, would rather gallop after veal than eat it!

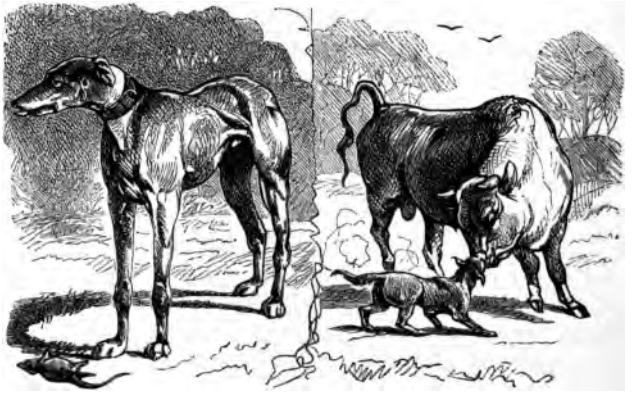
CHAPTER XVIII.

VARIOUS DOGS.—AMONG THE RABBITS.—BURIED ALIVE.—EARNING OUR FUN.—A BROKEN NOSE.

IN a general way we boys were restricted to the two dogs, Pepper and Wasp, as my father did not see the fun of keeping more than the scraps of the house would suffice to feed, or paying the tax for another. Now and then we succeeded in keeping one of Wasp's puppies for a while, but on my father's attention being drawn to it, when the tax-collector came round we had to find it a new home. This was easily done, for from having constantly gone out ratting with us from its earliest days, it had learnt a little of the business, and, besides, the reputation of our old dogs was so great, that their progeny was eagerly sought after.

If possible, we gave the puppy away to some one in the immediate neighbourhood, with the understanding that when we had the prospect of a big day's rabbiting, we were to have the loan of it; and so it often happened that we had half-a-dozen of the same family out with us. Mr. Wood kept two of the old stock, Nettle and Crab, besides Towzer, the yard-dog, who greatly preferred the liberty and excitement of ratting to performing the duties of guardian. He was a dog of character, and a "rum one" to look at, and though a

good-tempered, honest beast, it was better to be his friend than his foe. His mother was a big Irish retriever, and his father a pure-bred bull-dog, and he resembled both parents in looks and also in nature, for whereas he would retrieve a bird without biting it the least, he would crunch any animal from a rat to a



TOWZER AND LION.

badger, and I once saw him seize an infuriated bull by the nose, and hold it perfectly still for some minutes. Then there was Lion, the greyhound, who would trot by our side and make himself very useful when a rabbit was on foot, and though he would not hunt much, he was a splendid hand at picking up a rat, and would finish it off with one snap. He had become from great experience so cunning that he was shut out of the coursing-field, and earned the reputation of being a terrible poacher, for single-handed he could generally

kill a hare at the first hedge, and when he had done so would retrieve it splendidly.

Every now and then we received a message from a gentleman's keeper, to say he intended having a field day at the rabbits among the gorse on Telegraph Hill, some five miles away, and that he hoped we would bring out a good pack and lend him a hand. On these occasions we devoted the afternoon before the eventful day in collecting all the dogs we could from the neighbours, and it often happened that Pepper and Wasp had as many as ten or a dozen of their children with them that night, besides a lot of other friends, who occupied the loose box in the stable and every other available corner.

Mr. Wood's luggage cart, with a pig net thrown over it, made a famous conveyance for the pack, and with these crowded beneath the seat, and a big lunch basket at our feet, we drove off early next morning with the firm conviction that we were the happiest fellows in the country, and that the dogs, taking the lot together, were not to be matched in the world.

Telegraph Hill is a wild spot, far from any village or house, and surrounded by great open downs, with here and there a clump of Scotch firs, and great patches of thick gorse cut into squares of about a quarter of an acre each. The land is all sand and full of rabbits' burrows that have existed, I daresay, since the original rabbits that came out of the Ark were alive, and were far too deep to dig out.

The old keeper and his two boys met us at a little cottage on the down, and after putting up our horse in a shed, and letting out the dogs, he tells us that all the

burrows have been "doctored," and that we have a heavy job before us.

"Doctoring the burrows" has occupied him three days, and is done by running a muzzled ferret with a line on it through the holes, a few drops of spirits of tar having been first rubbed on its fur. The holes are left for one night, when every rabbit will leave them, then they are well stopped, and a piece of newspaper pegged down over the stopping, which effectually prevents the rabbits reopening them for some days.

The keeper tells us he has just finished running the nets round sufficient of the gorse squares to give us work till lunch time, and then whilst we are eating and the dogs resting, he will shift them further on.

"Pepper, come back, you volatile rogue! back, dogs, back! where are you running to? Now then, Pincher, don't get fighting," and so restraining the eager pack we march up to the first net and hie them in. The old hands are over in a moment, but those strange to the work commence a series of dives at the net, and have finally to be lifted over. "Yap, yap," goes old Wasp, and in a moment "yap, yap," echo all the young ones as they rush to her cry, and the gorse is swayed and shaken by their struggles to get through it. The old stagers just give themselves a wriggle, as much as to say, "we are among them and no mistake!" and then steadily hunt about, sniffing into every corner. We bipeds station ourselves at the nets, and are soon fully occupied in picking up the rabbits as they get entangled in them in their fruitless endeavours to shift their quarters, and in sending back the dogs that are inclined to stray into fresh squares. There are eight couples of dogs (including the keeper's) in the gorse, not to mention

old Lion and the keeper's knowing lurcher, that keep hovering round the outskirts, and during the day "account for" several hares that have jumped the nets. Many a poor bunny is chopped in the thick gorse, and before an hour is over our legs tingle from the numberless pricks we receive as we struggle through the brake to pick them up.

By one o'clock we are getting tired and very hungry, so when the last square is finished, we call out the dogs, and taking them to a pond in the hollow for a drink, we spread out our lunch, and lolling on the short soft turf peg away like Britons. Before we are recalled to work by the keeper, we are joined by the curate of the parish, who had come out, as he says, for a quiet pipe and a mouthful of fresh air. He accepts a mouthful of something more solid, and then is easily persuaded to join in the fun, and if his parishioners could only see him as he jumps and plunges about in the prickly gorse in a state of the maddest excitement, they would hardly recognise in him the serious sedate young man they are accustomed to! Well, it does him all the good in the world, and I only wish the poor fellow could oftener have such a spree. One day a week of this would make him five years younger and put twenty per cent. more spark and life into him, and yet he would always remain the good fellow he is. We work away till evening sets in, and then, as the nets have to be taken up and we have to drive home, and see to the dogs being fed, we hastily call them out of covert, and they now all readily pop into the cart and curl themselves up at once, for they are fairly tired out.

We "put to" the old horse, count the bag, about *fifty couple,* all share the remains of the beer, and then

we boys jog away home very tired, very happy, and very proud of the doings of our dogs, for they have one and all acquitted themselves well.

A curious and, I am sorry to say, fatal accident occurred near Telegraph Hill when we were boys. A young cobbler, who, report said, was more given to poaching than sewing leather, slipped off before daylight one Sunday morning with a spade on his shoulder and a ferret in his pocket, telling his wife that he should be home to breakfast. The day passed and he did not return, but thinking he might be hiding from the keepers and would slip back after dark, the wife did not trouble much about it; however, when the night went by without bringing the man or any news of him, she got fairly frightened, and the first thing in the morning she went to the keeper's house and asked if he had seen or heard anything of her husband, but he knew nothing of him. Little by little the news spread, and a feeling got abroad that something serious must have befallen the cobbler, and the wife and a few friends, who knew where the man intended going, started for Telegraph Hill in search of him. After wandering about for some time they came to a steep bank and discovered signs of his having been there, for they saw a quantity of freshly thrown-up earth, where evidently a rabbit had been dug for, and to make all clear there was the spade stuck upright in front of the hole. Picking this up, they were about to proceed when the wife caught sight of something almost buried in the sand, and on taking hold of it she discovered it to be her husband's foot! In a few minutes the sand was thrown back, and the poor fellow pulled out dead and stiff!

It seems that he had dug some distance into the side of the little hill or bank, following the ferret's line, and had then deeply undermined the face, and seeing a rabbit at the far end, had laid down and with outstretched arm had drawn himself up the hole to reach it. Whilst in this position the loose sand above him had given way and buried him alive. He had no business to be ferreting there, and would have done better had he stuck to his last.

In writing a narrative like this, somehow one naturally falls into the way of picking out all the most striking events of our boy life, but my young readers must not suppose that our life was all sport and excitement. No; young as we were, we were early taught that life has its duties as well as its pleasures, and that if we wanted fun and sport we must first earn them. Foremost of all, of course, came lessons, and when they were over we were frequently expected to make ourselves useful. A message had to be sent into the village. A little shopping to be done in the neighbouring town. Bacon wanted help in the garden. In a dozen ways a boy could earn his fun, and I am now proud to remember that we often spent every spare hour for weeks together digging in the garden, helping in the hay-field, felling timber, or riving and sawing up wood for the winter's fuel. Then there were wet days in which it was useless and unprofitable to go out, and these we spent in the little carpenter's shop, and before we left home to work for ourselves we could turn out a fairly made gate, hens' coop, dogs' kennel, garden seat or rabbits' hutch, besides saving our father many a shilling by mending and repairing the breakages of the house. I can't say our work was

highly finished, but we made it good and lasting, our maxim being "handsome is as handsome does." We were taught to look upon "loafing about" as a crime, and if we were caught doing nothing, we were told to "go in and read, or if you don't like that, go and break stones on the road—anything is better than idling about."

During the summer we rarely entered the house, except for lessons and meals, till it was time to go to bed, and far the pleasantest part of the day was that between our "heavy tea" and dark. Whatever work we had had on hand was then put aside, and we went in for fun with all our might. As long as it was light enough to see the ball we played cricket, rounders, or some such game, and when we could no longer see, out came Pepper and Wasp, and we drew the shrubbery for a chance rat or rabbit that might be on the move. Many is the old hedgehog we found on these rounds, but we were under strict orders not to hurt them, as our father liked to see them jogging about the garden, and did not share the popular belief that they were mischievous vermin, and that when the cows were lying down they would creep up and suck them dry. This was firmly believed in by our companions Billy Pettit and Eddy Frost, and I do not suppose there is a gamekeeper to be found that does not think they suck pheasants' and partridges' eggs, a belief about as reasonable as to suppose that rabbits and hares would eat fried ham. To my mind they are jolly, quaint, harmless little animals, and I should be sorry indeed to injure one. The old rectory garden was full of them, and we often found a nest of young ones, looking like small elongated horse chestnuts.

When there was no hope of vermin being on the prowl, or the dogs had done a hard day's work and had been put up for the night, we would run races, and it would have been better for my personal appearance had we not done so. For one night we had been ordered in to bed, but before obeying determined to have just one race round the house, starting from the front door, and one going one way and one the other. It was nearly dark, but we knew every inch of the way and there was nothing to stop us, so off we set. I had got to the halfway corner just by the pantry window, when, in rounding it, I came into collision with Bob, my nose hitting him fair on the forehead with such force that I saw ten thousand katherine wheels and sky rockets, and then collapsed flat on my back with the blood spirting out of my nose. I was soon indoors, and my dear mother, well accustomed to such mishaps, picked up my nose for me, for it had been knocked down flat on my face. Either she did not put it fairly on its legs, or it went astray afterwards, for sure it is, it has a decided lurch to the right.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUNDAYS.—OUR CHURCH.—"LOR' DER-ME."—SUNDAY EVENINGS.

THEN there were Sundays! Days on which it behoved us as parson's sons to be decorous and set a good example. Yet, thanks to the judicious management of our mother, who, in making it a day of rest, did not think it necessary to make it a day of dull dreariness for which a lively twelve hours on the treadmill would be a happy exchange, as so many good mothers do, we liked the day and were always pleased when we awoke to find it Sunday morning.

I say my *mother*, for on Sundays we were completely under her management, the father always having to devote his time before and between services to looking over his sermons, which he never managed to get written before midnight on Saturday.

It might be said that our Sundays began about midday on Saturday, for by that time they began to be felt. The big round of beef (with its attendant Yorkshire pudding) which we were to eat hot at our early dinner so that it might be cold next day, was twirling in the kitchen. The father began to be restless, feeling that he should soon have to settle down with his pen in the study. The Saturday clean-up was beginning to make itself felt, only to come to a climax long after

better, discipline was not nearly so strict, and when Bob and I got up a race during the sermon, between a couple of "sows" (wood-lice), which were always to be found behind the old worn-out bible at the corner of the pew, the mother pretended not to see. Then the church was crowded, the labourers on the left side, and their wives and daughters on the right, with the "hobble-de-hoys" (who always came into church at the last moment, with all the clatter they could) on forms in the belfry. The side aisles were occupied by the farmers in their respective pews, and the chancel by our pew on one side, and the school children opposite. All were in their best clothes, and all looked happy, sleepy, and contented, thanks to having just swallowed the best victuals, in quantity and quality, that they have had for a week. As they "breathe a prayer," a smell of pork, onions and strong cheese pervades the church, and becomes oppressive to the fastidious as the hymn is shouted out.

There were three great powers in the church. First and foremost the rector, and then, but not far behind him, the clerk, "old Tom Brown," who sat just under my father's nose, and had the Amens, which he pronounced "Um-un" all to himself, also the privilege of starting four words ahead of everyone in the responses, and finishing ten words behind them. He was a glorious cheery, big, burly old fellow, who had officiated as clerk for twenty years, and was so well up in the service, psalms included, that he was never seen to look at a book, and, that there be no deception about it, always wore his big silver-mounted spectacles, well up on his forehead, which at a little distance made him look as *if he had four* eyes. Thirdly and lastly, came the

musicians, but as they were in the habit of going round from house to house at Christmas time, and blaring forth secular music, they were looked upon with little awe, and were not to be thought of on the same day with Tom Brown, who not only said the Amens, but

MUSICIANS AT CHURCH.

did almost as much as the parson in the marriages, christenings, and funerals. We were, however, very proud of our singing, and felt a sort of pity for all the neighbouring churches that were not so well off, and this became one of contempt towards the next parish,

when the parson there put down the wind instruments, and started the singing with a tuning fork. Why you could hear what the words were they sang, and there was no good volume of sound, as with us! I have heard the Doctor say, that above the rattle of his wheels, he has distinctly heard our music as he passed on the road. And yet we only had three instruments; namely, an accordion, a flageolet, and some sort of brass instrument, that the man pulled in and out as fast as he could, whilst he blew down it with such force, that his neck swelled, his face turned purple, and his eyes nearly came out of his head. Oh, it was splendid, and I have heard nothing like it since.

When the sermon was over, the blessing given, and for the space of half a minute we boys had smelt the insides of our hats, that we had held ready for the last quarter of an hour, and the girls their muffs, we all flocked out of church, and up to the gateway, and there, whilst awaiting my father, who was taking off his gown, and discussing parish business with Tom Brown, we shook hands with our neighbours, and exchanged the news of the day. Then up would stump my father, and taking out his watch, the one *his* father had worn on the field of Waterloo, which therefore *could not* be wrong, he would challenge Mr. Ball, the churchwarden, to give him the time. Now Mr. Ball's watch had belonged to *his* father, and was in his pocket when he was killed by the mail coach upsetting into Twyford marl pit, and therefore it also was beyond question. Strange as it may appear, these two infallible watches were never found to be exactly the same, and so Sunday after Sunday they led to discussion, and the parson *and churchwarden* separated full of indignation at

doubt having been thrown on their respective time-keepers.

Leaving the farmers standing round the gate, discussing the price of corn, and beasts, and fixing wages for the next week (the farmers always had a union!) we trooped off home, down the lane past the clay pits, where we boys lingered with a longing to turn in, and have a go at the stickle-backs, rats and moor hens, but were restrained by a warning look from our mother. Old Tom Brown walked by my father, and I remember his once bringing the poor old fellow to book in a ludicrous manner. Tom Brown prefaced every remark he made, with "Lor' der-me, sir." For twenty years this had been overlooked, but at last one Sunday after preaching a powerful sermon on the Third Commandment, my father thought it about time to venture a few remarks on the subject. "Do you know, Tom, you have got into a sad bad habit. Of course I don't for a moment think that you do it intentionally, it is a trick, but as clerk of the parish it looks bad, and is a bad example to others. You hardly ever say anything without using an oath." "An oath, sir! Lor' der-me, sir, I never used an oath in my life, that I can rightly remember."

"There you go, you used one then; the fact is you are so accustomed to it, you don't notice what you say; you began with 'damn me.'" "Lor' der-me, sir, whatever are you a saying on? I never said damn me in my life. What I say is der-me, sir, not damn me. Lor' der-me, sir, I hope you won't think nothing so bad on me." After this lucid explanation, my father apologised for the mistake he had made, and he and old Tom settled to forget all about it.

On reaching home we had the feeling that the severest part of Sunday was over, and that we might safely relax some of the tension we had kept up all day, and as a preliminary step, we boys put on our second best jackets, and the father came out in his shooting-coat, with a cigarette in his mouth, and we all strolled about the grounds, looking at the flowers, eating anything that might be ripe in the fruit garden, admiring the pigs, rabbits, dogs, ferrets and other live stock till tea was announced, which it always was a little earlier than usual, that the maids might get an outing. Nearly every Sunday evening we were joined by Mr. B——, the rector of the next parish, who having neither kith nor kin at home, enjoyed a laugh with us young ones during tea, and then a chat afterwards with the father and mother, as they strolled about the garden, and vaunted their respective plans for budding roses, taking cuttings and propagating flowers, and general horticulture.

I remember on one of these occasions coming to a pear-tree, that had been in the garden for years, but had never produced any fruit. The father said it should not cumber the ground longer, and taking hold of it as high as he could reach, pulled it over till the roots were broken, and the boughs rested on the ground. It would not come quite up, so was left in its recumbent position, to be finished off at a more fitting time. Fortunately this time never came and the tree was neglected, the result being that the next summer it was loaded with fruit, and has been one of the best trees in the garden ever since!

In winter time, when it was too cold for such quiet *outdoor* amusements, we all would go for a brisk walk

till tea-time, and spend the evening afterwards roasting chestnuts on the shovel, cracking nuts or eating oranges, and all the time chatting away as fast as our tongues could go. Some of my readers may think that we were slack in our Sunday observances, and ought to have kept them more strictly. I can only say, that in one respect the result has been good; we learnt to look on Sunday with pleasure, and not, like many people, as a day to be dreaded for its gloom and dulness, a day to be endured for appearance sake, and for the rest it brings, but without any higher motive.

CHAPTER XX.

MARSHFORD.—GOING TO THE FAIR.—THE HORSE AUCTION.—THE FROLIC FAIR.—PATRONISED BY HER MAJESTY.—DEGENERATE DAYS.

ABOUT four and a half miles from our gate was the old market-town of Marshford, one of those places only to be found at a considerable distance from the "heart of England," and "up a corner" of the tight little island, a corner so isolated that the inhabitants looked upon it as a sort of principality belonging to the mother country, but far superior to it in every way, and therefore pity, not unmingled with contempt, was felt for all who were forced to live outside the happy land. I say forced, for there was a belief abroad, that all the world longed to be one of the privileged people, and that it behoved the said people to repulse all outsiders by coldness and contempt, for fear they should establish a footing on the sacred soil. Very few of the young men of the corner dared to brave the ire of their fellows by introducing a bride from over the border, hence it came about that everyone was related to everyone else, and formed one delightfully happy family, who, all having exactly the same ideas, and the same pursuits, got on famously, and showed the close relationship by calling

every man, young or old, by some pet abbreviation or nickname!

Marshford was just about the middle of the corner, and therefore was within a drive of all, and on market days everyone was to be met within half an hour somewhere in the streets of the pretty, busy, bustling town, some bent on business, but the greater part come to see their friends, and have a chat. The townspeople quite recognised the rights of the country, and on market days kept within doors, or went into the country, and so made more room for their guests in the narrow queer old streets. For fear, I suppose, of being taken for townspeople, no one ever for a moment kept the right side of the pavement, but went tacking backwards and forwards to the destruction of all hope in those who had anything to do, and a limited time to do it in, but no one ever thought of getting out of temper, or resented having his toes trod on in front, his hat knocked over his eyes from behind, or being jostled into the gutter. Now and then some chief constable, with more zeal than wisdom, attempted to "regulate the traffic," and the very largest, stolidest and sourest faced policemen were stuck about at intervals on the pavement to say "Move on, please move on," but as no one paid the least attention, they were soon taken off. Then big white boards with black letters were stuck up at the corners, requesting foot passengers to walk to the right, but these being taken for some new dodge in advertising, the deep meaning of which was not very plain, a crowd collected before each, and confusion became confounded. The boards were taken down and then on we all went, lunging and plunging, higgledy-piggledy, greatly enjoying the jostling, and firmly

believing there was not such another town as Marshford in the British Isles, and I don't think there was.

Our father having a very reasonable dread of the wickednesses we country boys might hear and learn, if we became too familiar with town life, kept us out of Marshford as much as possible, and it was not till we were well up in our teens, and could be trusted, that we were allowed to go there often. Even then our liberty was given us in fear and trembling, and only as a sort of mild training, before we should have to be let loose on the world, with all our country greenness fresh upon us.

We took kindly to the ways of the town, and generally found some excuse to get in on market days, but the day of all days was in the spring, when the great annual fair was held. To this we looked forward for weeks, and saved up all the money we could get. Year after year Mr. Wood would pick us up at our gate, where we had been waiting, generally an hour or more, rigged out in our best, and drive us off in his high dog-cart and fast trotting mare, and after threading his way along the road past the "slow coaches" through the sheep, young colts, Welsh ponies, bullocks lean and fat, barking dogs, scared women, screaming children and yelling boys, land us safely in the yard of the Black Swan, free to wander for the entire day midst bustle, noise, fighting, laughing, selling, buying, sight-seeing, and jollity, till, tired and weary, we dragged ourselves back, and then dashed out of the town just as the lamps were being lighted, and so home.

But just now we are as fresh as young lions and eager to begin, and as the day is not half long enough for all the fun, we will squeeze our way as fast as we can

through the fruit market, up Jail Street, through the White Horse Yard, and here we are in Long Acre, in the midst of the fair. Now we will take it quietly, and see all we can, beginning at the horse auction, where Mr. Sellman is calling out, "Warranted sound in wind and limb, quiet to ride and drive in double and single

THE HORSE FAIR.

harness, been hunted and carried a lady," over a bob-tailed old mare, that is being run out by the finest showman in England. For a minute or two he stands the mare up against the auctioneer's box, and then when all buyers and non-buyers are crowding round, he gives her a back-handed flick of the whip, and with a "Hey-hey,

room, gentlemen, room," dashes out through the crowd, sending it right and left, with many an aching toe. "Hey-hey," and away he goes down the road with such superior knee action and general style, that the veriest old screw must be stirred with emulation and step its best, and if its best is not much to look at, the showman's is so good, that the minds of the spectators become confused, and the horse gets the credit that the man has so ably earned for it, and the bidding goes on faster and faster. Many is the man who came into the ring without the remotest thought of bidding, that finds himself nodding his head like mad over horses he has no need for.

Well, we won't be tempted, so come along this way, past the man with the ground ash sticks, past the knife-grinder, to the donkey market, where some fifty of the poor little beasts are being knocked about till donkey nature is destroyed, and there is not a kick left in the lot. Now we will just turn aside for awhile, to refresh our young imaginations by standing on the middle of the bridge leading to the jail, on the very spot where all the murderers have been hung for hundreds of years past; and then, having renewed our energies on the place where so much energy has come to an end, we jostle our way past the patient sheep and bullocks, and the noisy, swearing, smock-frocked drovers and dealers, who stand about with their sticks stuck through their elbows behind them, and their stock-dogs peeping eagerly between their begaitered legs.

Past all we go, on and on, till at last we are among the booths of the frolic fair. Ah! this is glorious indeed, and far beyond the pen of mortal man to describe. To *say that* there were hundreds and hundreds of yards of

gingerbread stalls, apple stalls, sweet stalls, cake stalls, cocoa-nut stalls, toy stalls and pickled-whelk stalls, is feeble! Then there were the shows. "The Giant and Dwarf," "The Fat Boy," "The Two Pelicans," "The Seal," "The Snake," "The Happy Family," and dozens more, all for one penny; and, surpassing all, "The Royal and Imperial Hippodrome, patronised by the Queen and Royal Family, and by His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of the French." ("Ah, these big people know what's good, don't they, Bob!") Then, side by side to the circus, is the wild-beast show; and, as we pass by the vans, we can hear the screeching of the smaller, and the roaring of the larger animals. We will pay our sixpence and go in here at once, as the showman announces that the Lion Queen is about to perform her renowned feats in her subjects' dens, and calling to mind a remark of our father's after last fair, that all lion tamers have their heads snapped off sooner or later, we hope for the best, and midst the clash of martial music, ascend the steps, and, paying our money to the big lady in the small box, get the first whiff from that fragrant interior—we remember it well—and it is so delicious, we should think the sixpence well spent if we went no further. On first getting inside, a feeling, partly awe, partly fear, but all pleasure, tingles through our very hearts; and we move quietly round the dens, just taking the cream off the sight, before we fall to and enjoy it all.

We soon feel at home, and, while waiting for the Lion Queen, we feed the lovely monkeys with nuts, which we buy from an old woman who stands all ready with her basket. The elephants are next visited, and after making one of the poor beasts ring his bell for

pieces of gingerbread a dozen times, we get over all fear of the huge creature, and even walk up beside him, and pat his big round skinny leg. Remembering the last time we were in a wild-beast show a man made quite a hero of himself by giving the elephant pieces of cake from his lips, we think we might also distinguish ourselves, and essay to do the same; but just as the long finger-like thing at the end of the trunk, begins to curl backwards within an inch of my nose, my pluck fails me, and I turn away my head, thus baulking the patient beast of his expected tit-bit. At last, I summoned up sufficient courage to keep still; but the elephant, naturally supposing I should serve him as I had before, slowly approaches my mouth, with the end of his trunk, and then expanding the orifice makes a dab at the cake, which he cleverly extracts, but, at the same time, nearly stifles me with slobber. Partially from the force of the shove he gives me, partially from fear, I roll over in the saw-dust, and then make tracks on my hands and knees, at a surprising rate, amid the shouts and gibes of all the spectators. I continue my retreat till half way up the show, expecting every moment to be grabbed from behind and crushed to death; and, at last, when I scramble to my feet, I am such a pitiable object, that the Lion Queen, who has watched the scene, takes compassion on me, and leads me off to a tent in the rear, where I wash my face in a stable-bucket, and brush my clothes. I felt mortified and humiliated at first, but my "amour propre" was soon restored by the fact of being patronised and cared for by such a very great personage as Her Majesty; and I felt proud and flattered when *she* proposed having a pot of gin and beer, for which

she kindly allowed me to pay. She was a delightful young person, most condescending and affable; but, somehow, she did not quite come up to the idea I had formed of her, from her full-length picture on the outside of the menagerie, which depicted her in very short petticoats, standing with one splendidly proportioned leg and foot advanced, threatening a raging lion with her whip, and quelling the fury of the beast by her expressive and commanding eyes. The petticoats were there, short enough, covered with splendid spangles, but they were not very clean; the leg was far too stout, and the stocking creased and stained at the knee; the little foot would not have got into one of my shooting boots; and, at the time I am speaking of, she had only one eye visible, the other being closed and very black. Never mind, she was the Queen; and would she not soon be in the lion's den? and might not that somewhat bloated face and fuzzy head, in a few minutes be sliding slowly down a beast's throat, on its way to his stomach, whilst those robust legs kicked on the boards in a death struggle? I had just indulged in this awful thought, when the bell rang for her to perform; and, having drained the pot (she drank every drop herself), she jumped up, and, I following, we made our appearance in public together; and I felt proud and flattered when she turned at the very door of the den and shook hands with me, and bade me good-bye. I fear I shall disappoint my readers, but the truth must be told: her head was *not* snapped off, though she teased the lions in a most unmerciful way; but—she did spit, twice; and, at the last one, every atom of romance I felt for her evaporated, and I turned away in disgust, though *now* I think I was wrong, seeing that I w[illegible]

in a beasts' show, and had paid sixpence to be there.

The day was getting on, and we were getting hungry; so we hurried off, and, after refreshing ourselves with three pennyworth of gingerbread, all in the shape of hearts, and a bottle of "pop," we pushed our way into the circus, and had the pleasure of seeing "Mazeppa bound on to his fiery steed, and plunge away, away, far over the rolling prairie,"—that is to say, five and a half times round the ring; and then get down and strut off, shortly to reappear in another costume on a tight-rope with a long pole in his hands. Oh! it was magnificent, and when the clown came in and went through the fine racy old jokes, we laughed till we cried, and quite envied the wife and children of such a splendid fellow.

By the time the performance was over, our legs and feet began to ache a bit; but, thrusting aside fatigue, we struggled on through all the shows, and finished up by trying the force of our blows on a registering spring-cushion, seeing how much we could pull, and getting weighed.

Ah! fairs were fairs in those days, ten times better than they are now; and Bacon says, even these glorious shows are nothing to what they were when he was a boy. Doubtless, things get worse and worse, and we pity those who are to be born when we are gone and done for!

Among the various things that I have seen grow worse as time has gone galloping on (it gallops with me), is the internal arrangement of the human. When we were boys, nothing came amiss to us in the way of victuals; and we could dispose of any amount of tuck, *penny tarts*, green gooseberries, apples ripe or unripe,

swede turnips, horse beans, and stone fruit. Now, I cannot touch one of these delicious delicacies; and it is not because I am getting on in years, for if my young ones eat a swede turnip or two, they are sure to be ill, and I have to get out of bed in the middle of the night to quiet a nightmare.

Then what poor things we are when we sit down to table! We pick at this, and taste that, and are never really hungry, but have to be content if we have an appetite. Now in the good old days when we were young, we were ravenous before meals, and hungry after; and there was never a moment in the twenty-four hours when we could not have eaten a dish of strawberries, six pennyworth of tarts, or a turnip.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAST INSTEAD OF A FEAST.—A HORSE IN THE HOUSE.—A PENSIONED HUNTER.—LOOKING "PIGGY."—DOMINIE, THE PARSON'S HOBBY.—MOONLIGHT STEEPLECHASES —HOLDING THE DOCTOR'S HORSE.—A RACE IN NIGHT-GOWNS.

I REMEMBER once, when we were about half-way up in our teens, being nearly starved to death, or at least we thought so at the time. It was brought about on this wise. About two miles from our home lived an old gentleman and his wife, named Grey, who rented a large farm. He was one of the old-fashioned sort, given to early rising, early feeding, and open-handed hospitality. His greatest pleasure was to see a few friends round his table, and to laugh and chat with them afterwards, as he sat over the keeping-room fire, with a churchwarden pipe in his mouth. His wife rather differed from him in her ideas; for, whereas he liked doing things in the same way his father and grandfather had done them before him, she wished to go with the times and do all in a correct and *genteel* manner; and the result was that when their guests were strange to their ways, they felt an awkward constraint that it was difficult to get over; and it was only old friends and cronies that felt quite at home, and enjoyed the old

man's society, while they laughed at the lady's fine airs and graces.

The old fellow had always been most kind to us boys, and allowed us to go ratting and rabbiting all over his land, and when he found us near his house would insist on our coming in to have a "tuck out." Mrs. Grey did not like these unpremeditated feeds, but, being just as hospitable as her husband, she asked us over and over again to "walk up and take tea," in a formal manner. One thing and another prevented our doing so, until, one day, meeting Mr. Grey in the road, he said he hoped we would fix an evening, for he was sure his missis would be pleased at our doing so.

Accordingly a day was arranged, but no time was mentioned; so we thought we should be all right if we got to his house by 6 p.m., that being a usual time for "high tea" in the country. As it so happened, Bob and I had to go into Marshford in the morning; and, being detained there till the afternoon, had only a few tarts at the pastrycook's for lunch, and were sharp set with hunger by the time we reached home. We were a little late, so had to hurry through our dressing and be off without breaking our fast. By dint of running nearly all the two miles, we arrived, with our hunger greatly increased, at Mr. Grey's door just five minutes past six; and on being shown in, were somewhat surprised at seeing no tea on the table, and at our hostess expressing her regret in a somewhat reproachful voice at our being so late. We apologised, but did not think much of the matter, as we thought tea *might* have been got ready before we put in our appearance.

We were very glad to find our old friend Mr. Wood sitting by the fire, and in a few minutes we all drew

our chairs round, and started a chat about hunting, shooting, horses, dogs, turnips, and fat beasts, and the thousand other things that interest country folk.

As time sped on, what had been appetite at four o'clock in the afternoon, and then hunger, had now developed into a wolf gnawing at our vitals; and, however interesting were the anecdotes to which we were listening, half our minds were fixed on food, and we kept one eye on the door, longing to see the tea-tray make its appearance. Twice, Mrs. Grey put down her work and left the room, and we could hardly refrain from expressing our hope that she had gone to fetch it herself; but each time she returned and resumed her needle as if food had never troubled her mind. Then Mr. Wood and old Grey looked happy and contented, and evidently did not feel the same gnawing pangs that we did; and when Mr. Wood was asked if he would take anything with his pipe, he said, "No," clearly showing that he was not "hard set." Seven o'clock came, and we felt quite faint. Eight, and we ceased talking, and thought of roast beef and other solids; and, at nine, we were on the point of giving a hint that we should collapse inwards if something were not quickly put inside to prevent us, when, hurrah! the door opened a bit and we heard—yes, there was no mistaking it—the rattle of a tray. How our mouths watered, how we brightened up; but, alas! to what depths of despair we fell when slowly a tiny tray appeared through the doorway, with nothing on it but two decanters of wine, and a plate of thin biscuits, the whole of which either of us could have swallowed in half a minute! Something must be done, and done quickly; so, jumping up, I exclaimed, "Oh, I had no idea it was so late, we must

be off at once. Thank you, no wine." And then, making our adieus we hurried off, accompanied by Mr. Wood, whose house we had to pass on our way home. On getting clear of the premises, we both gave vent to our outraged feelings; and, after a hearty laugh at our expense, Mr. Wood informed us that a heavy tea had been prepared for us at five o'clock, more than an hour before our arrival; and, thinking something had prevented us from coming, all had been finished and cleared away shortly before we put in an appearance. Mr. and Mrs. Grey, no doubt, took it for granted that we had had our tea before leaving home, and therefore did not offer us any more. We swore Mr. Wood to secrecy, and then gladly turned in at his gate, and in a few minutes were ravenously devouring cold beef, bread and cheese, with excellent home-brewed beer.

"I say, Jane, just go and see if that old gentleman is on the move, and if you can stir him up; take some coals into the study, and accidentally tread on his pet corn. I am almost frozen standing here, holding his old hobby. I should not mind if it could go out of a jog, or could leap a bit; but it can't, for I have tried it."

"Lor, Master Harry, come in, du now."

"Yes, and bring the horse in with me, I suppose?"

"Gracious on to me, what ideas du come into your head, sure-ly! No, you dussent du that."

"Who says 'I 'dussent'? I will;" and, suiting the action to the word, I quietly open the front door, and, being reassured by hearing the voices of my father and old Mr. Spurgeon, the rector of a neighbouring parish, droning away in the study, I lead the old white beast forward on the felt drugget, past the foot of the

stairs, past the drawing-room door to the turn by the old clock, at which the old fellow shies a little. Then all is straight sailing. I have only to pass the study door, go through the spring door, and so straight out by the kitchen passage into the back yard beyond. Just as I get to the study door, I hear a chuckling laugh; a good-bye, and then it opens, Mr. Spurgeon appears, and I am caught in the very act. Oh, if the cellars would only open, as my father shouts that they will, and swallow me up, horse and all, and so put an end to my misery! There was nothing for it, I lead on the old white beast, now my *bête noire*, and get safely into the back yard, stormed at by my father, laughed at by his friend—to whom I am for ever after grateful for having made a joke of the affair, and so saved me from punishment.

For a long time, a pensioner lived in the big pasture at the back of the house in the shape of a fine old hunter, who, having started "navicular" after carrying my father splendidly for some years, was given a run for the rest of his life; and, as the pasture was rich, and he had a nice shed in the far corner where he could retire out of the cold and pick a lock of hay in winter, or stand and flick his swish tail at the flies in summer, he had a good time of it. As long as old "Philip" kept on the turf, and whilst the ground was soft, he was as sound as a bell; but only a few hundred yards on the hard road brought on the pain, and his long slinging action became a sort of mag-pie hop.

My father fondly believed, and I have often heard him assert, that no one had been on his back for years; but I must plead guilty to having had many a splendid gallop on him, and even an occasional steeple-chase

across the fields on a moonlight night when my father was safely settled down to his sermon; and very "piggy" I felt when I heard my father tell his friends, as they stood admiring the old horse from the garden path, that "he actually was so fond of jumping that now and then he would go *all by himself*, or with the pony, and take a gallop over hedge and ditch a mile

PIGGY.

out and home again, and this in the middle of the night!"

By-the-bye, I must here apologise for using the above term "piggy," which is a purely family expression, and arose from a vicious habit our old sow had of breaking out from her sty and then coming into the garden to do all the mischief she could. At first, she would trot forward in a determined manner, as if to make us believe she was on legitimate business. Then, the enormity of what she was doing would strike her; she would flap her ears and keep turning her head from side to side and her tail in the opposite direction, and trot on up the drive at a reduced and uncertain pace,

glancing furtively at the windows with her little cunning white-lashed eyes; then, overcome by her fears, she would suddenly halt, turn round and bolt; but only to come forward again in the same manner. A living picture of conscious evil-doing. We young humans so often experienced the feeling that the old sow so plainly exhibited, that "looking piggy" became a household word, and now seems to me more expressive than self-conscious.

Besides old "Philip," the pensioner, there was "the parson's hobby," a queer mis-shapen old cob, given to falling down, fond of good living, that could trot ten miles an hour if a man was behind him, but refused to do more than six, on the flat, with a walk up and down all hills, if my mother was driving. Only let a horn or the cry of a hound be heard in the distance, and "Dominie" pulled himself together, stuck up his tail and ears, and, as old Bacon said, put £10 on his own price. Once out with the hounds, and there was no "stowing" him; he would either jump over or creep through the thickest place, and the run must be a good one indeed if "Dominie" were not in it. He hunted like a gentleman, not to carry his rider, but because he liked the sport, and he proved this on several occasions by getting rid of his rider and then going on alone through the run.

I remember once, when he was quietly standing in the coach-house with two horse clippers sitting between his legs busily at work on him, "loo-loo" was heard from the big field beyond the shrubbery, and, in a moment, "Dominie" was gone through the orchard, with a joyful kick up behind, then over the hogback stile, *through* the trees and over the hedge and ditch into

the field; and, there, seeing the greyhounds running at the far end, off he started and enjoyed a splendid run 'midst the shouts of laughter which his half-clipped appearance brought from the field. Next to hunting and coursing, "Dominie" loved nothing so much as a good skylark, and "Philip" was equally fond of it; but, as my father thought the old cob had enough to do in dragging the family "shandrydan," it was only now and then that we could indulge him, and then we had to wait for a time when the father was safe out of the way or in the study with his *slippers* on. A nice damp, rather cloudy night, when the moon was at the full, was the best time for this. The hedges stood out clearest, and, on such nights, after making sure the father's slippers were gone from the boot closet, we would slip out to the stable, and while one popped the bridle on the cob (we dispensed with saddles) the other stole off to the field with a feed of corn, and, whilst the old horse was nibbling it, the bit was got into his mouth.

Then the one on the cob would go forward over the bank and hedge, half way across the big field, and, after several signals were given by low whistles to know if all was ready, a sharper one would start us; sitting well down, off we went and the race was begun. Fortunately, though there were a lot of hedges they were all small, and from having gone over the course scores of times, the horses knew exactly what they were about; and well it was they did, for there was not much judgment in the riders, our only thought being to shove along the whole way at top speed and fly all the jumps. We very rarely had a fall, and when we did we were not hurt, as boys, like thistle-down, come to the ground.

lightly, and we were soon up and on again if we were fortunate enough to stick to our reins. If not, the animal would gallop on alone, round the big oak at the end of the course, and then home again. "Dominie" had to be rubbed dry after these gallops for fear he should catch cold, but for "Philip" there was no fear. He was always so excited that for an hour afterwards he would trot round the field, his tail stuck straight up in the air, his legs well lifted and flung forward, and every now and then giving a sounding snort and then bursting into a gallop.

These nocturnal steeplechases could only be indulged in when the crops were off the ground, and when the moon favoured us. At other times, we borrowed the miller's pony; and, with "Dominie" in the shafts of the luggage cart and the other for leader, we would take a moonlight drive round the country, which on more than one occasion finished in a roadside ditch. I have ridden and driven many a mile since those days, but nothing in the way of locomotion ever came up to those stolen outings.

We also snatched many little rides in the daytime (such as when Mr. R. came a-courting), and at last we thought it quite a part of our duty to volunteer to take round to the stable any horse that came; and, before putting it in, ride him (if he would jump) over the bar that was permanently stretched across the path in the shubbery.

There being a lot of us in the house, all more or less given to taking contagious diseases, to say nothing of eating turnips and green apples, the doctor was pretty often in requisition, and we were always on the look-*out for* him and kindly offered to take his horse.

While he looked at tongues and felt pulses we exercised his beast over the bar, and over and over again the doctor remarked "that our stables must be far too hot, for his horse invariably 'broke out' when brought to our house."

It was through this doctor, however, that our jumping-bar was finally done away with; for, on his coming one day on a new horse (a red-hot chestnut), we as usual took him to the shubbery and sent him at the bar. He was a loose-necked, star-gazing, uneducated beast, with a mouth of iron; so, after hilting all round and pecking badly it ran away, and in less than half a minute Bob was discovered by my father and the doctor hauling at the brute in a big bed of verbenas directly under the windows. All came out then, and the excuse we offered, "that the doctor told us to keep the horse moving," not being accepted, we were sent to bed for the *rest of the day.* Parents cannot be too careful how they word their orders; for instance, my father said the "rest of the day," but he did not mention the night; so, directly the day was done, taking advantage of his having a few friends to late dinner, we slipped out of bed in our night-gowns and took to racing round and round the house in this light and airy costume, the pleasure and excitement of the game being greatly enhanced by having to pass on our hands and knees close to the wall under the dining-room windows which were open. Dear old Miss Brown so nearly got us into fresh trouble, for getting up to throw a wasp which she had just killed on her plate out of the window, she came upon us stealing by. However, she showed great presence of mind, and returned to her place without saying a word and looking as grave as a

judge, and a minute later greatly pleased my father by laughing at his well-worn tale of the bagman at Waterloo, as if she would drop from her chair. If Miss Brown behaved well, the doctor did not; for we remarked afterwards that, whenever we were the least out of sorts, he sent us the most filthy decoctions, and twice made us put on severe mustard plasters as a preventive. A *preventive,* indeed; it was all vicious spite!

CHAPTER XXII.

A VENOMOUS RAT'S BITE.—LEFT ALONE.—FOREGOING A PLEASURE.—ONE-EYED JACK.—MY NEW PONY.—IN HASTE TO THE WEDDING.—A 'CUTE RUSTIC.

OUR favourite amusement, rat-catching, very nearly came to an abrupt and untimely end when I was about fifteen years old and Bob a little younger; and, as it was, the event I am about to relate separated us for two years, and I had in future to prosecute it alone, or with the occasional help of other boys. It happened thus.

We were passing through a neighbouring village, on our way to some meadows, where we had been told a colony of rats were to be found, when the butcher called us and asked as a great favour if we would run the ferrets through his barn, as there were a "sight of rats there." We hesitated at first, for we never cared for rat-catching in villages, because of the crowd of people that would come to look on, and because we never had such good sport as along some quiet bank; but the butcher was very pressing, and he showed us that he could shut his yard gates and keep all quiet. It was a small barn, and one end was filled with wheat in the straw, and the other with old hurdles. Bob took

the ferrets, and put two in at the farthest corner, whilst I stood at the other side with the two dogs. Hardly had the ferrets disappeared before a big rat bolted out of the very hole at which the ferret had gone in, and made through Bob's legs for the stack of hurdles. He had no stick in his hand; and, knowing the dogs could not reach it before it made its escape, he threw himself down and made a grab at it with his hands, and just succeeded in catching it; but his hold was not quite in the proper place, so the rat managed to turn its head and bite him almost through the end of his first finger. In a moment Bob dashed it on the ground and killed it, and then, wrapping his handkerchief round his hand, went on with the serious work he was engaged in. The finger ached and throbbed, but this was nothing, it would soon pass off, as the aches and throbs of numerous other rat-bites had done.

The butcher was right, there was a "sight of vermin," and for more than an hour all our energy and attention were engrossed by them. At last the ferrets came out and were bagged, and we started for the meadows; but we never reached them, for, before we had gone far, poor Bob's finger ached so much that he felt sick and faint; so we turned back and hurried home, and at twelve o'clock that night my father drove off five miles to fetch the doctor to see Bob, who was delirious. For three days the doctor scarcely left his room, and during most of that time his life hung by a thread. The finger was lanced, leeches put on his side under the arm, and the great fight against that enemy who is sure to gain the victory at the last was for this time won; but it left Bob so weak that a change of air was *thought* necessary, and he went to stay with an aunt at

the other side of England, and was away two years. Such was the unexpected result of the poisonous bite of a rat in a butcher's yard.

Almost any change is looked forward to by the young, and for this reason we neither of us cared as we might have done for the prospect before us. Bob was keen to be off on his visit, where he had a cousin just his own age ready to welcome him; and I was rather pleased at the thoughts of having the dogs, ferrets, pigs, etc., all to myself; and then, too, we thought the separation would only last as many months as it did years.

I got on famously alone, the first day. I re-arranged the ferrets' boxes, moved the dogs' kennels, and finished up by writing Bob a long letter to tell him what I had done. It was rather lonely at night, more lonely at lessons next day, and before the afternoon was over I was utterly wretched; and for weeks after no one can tell the forlorn, deserted feeling I suffered from. All the life was taken out of my usual enjoyments, and I wandered about in a dull, listless manner. My only comfort when out of the house was in Pepper and Wasp, and I am sure if it had not been for them, and the feeling of companionship they engendered, I should have been seriously ill. I "went to the dogs," heart and soul, and would talk to them for hours, quite believing they understood all I said, and I still believe they understood a good deal. Pepper would do his best to beguile me out of myself by his numberless tricks and queer humours; but old Wasp would place herself between my legs, as I sat on a bank, and do her best to comprehend all the grievances I poured into her willing ears. I can see her now, as she stood wist-

fully looking into my face with her bright, black eyes, turning her head from side to side, and sticking up one ear; and then, when I made a point in my narrative, wagging her tail violently; or, if I was very melancholy, she would lick my hand as fast as she could, and if she failed by this means to comfort me, she would stand and bark with all her might, as if to scare dull care away.

Dear old dogs! I have had dozens of your tribe since you were laid to rest under the big walnut tree, and many that I have dearly loved, but, of all the four-footed friends I have owned, there are none I remember with such kindly feelings as you two companions of my boyhood; and, as long as I live, I shall, for your sakes, have a kindly word for every dog I happen to have a chat with.

Time, that soother of all our troubles, as long as we are in the land of the living, soon began to have a beneficial effect on me; besides, I helped on my recovery by taking another first-class medicine, "hard work;" and I am sure the rats had more reason to regret Bob's absence than even I had, for I harassed them early and late, and there was no rest for them till they were stretched out in my wallet, and time, assisted by boy and dogs, had run their troubles, pleasures, hopes, and fears to ground, and all was over with them.

One of their gang had deprived me of my companion, and made me miserable; so it was only natural that I should be down on them with all my might. My energetic onslaught soon had the result of so thinning their numbers that I often had *miles of* hedge and ditch to beat without any sport,

and Bob's absence began once more to make itself felt, when a most delightful and unexpected distraction arrived in the shape of a pony!

Yes, a real live pony, as handsome as a picture, and as good as gold, at least so I always fondly believed. This is how I came by it. An elder brother who had been abroad for some years arrived to pay us a visit; and, whilst doing so, received a summons to the North of Wales on business; and, catching my father in a good mind the day previous to his starting, extracted from him permission to take me on the trip. It was somewhat reluctantly given, as I had had a good many chance holidays lately, and lessons were in arrears and required working up, but it *was* given; and, for just twenty hours, I was the happiest and busiest boy within miles. Packing up was commenced at once, and if George (my brother) had not interfered I should have put up enough things for a five years' trip to the centre of Africa. Then the dogs, ferrets, rabbits, birds, and other pets had to be arranged for; and it was only through having a firm belief in old Bacon, who took charge of them, that I could leave my numerous charges with comfort.

At last all was arranged, and my luggage, having been reduced to one small portmanteau, was packed ready and standing on end at the front door, waiting for the pony-cart to take us to the station.. Good-byes were about half over when my father called me into his study and said, "Look here, Harry, I have an offer to make; you can accept or refuse it as you like. If you will now give up your trip, which will be over in a week, I will give you £15 to buy yourself a pony, the pleasure of which will last you for years."

Never before was a good offer received with such a heavy heart—it was like telling a thirsty man that if he would forego the cup at his lips he should be supplied with wine for years; but, after a minute's reflection, there was no doubt about what I should do, and my determination was further backed by George, who promised, if I had not got a pony by the time he returned, that he would help me to buy one. In spite of the wisdom I felt I had exhibited in my choice, I was somewhat down-hearted as I watched the pony-cart drive off, and then shouldered my portmanteau, and carried it up-stairs again. However, I soon got over this feeling, and being given a whole holiday by my father, I ran myself off my legs looking for a pony. Every beast for sale for miles round, from a cart-horse to a child's pet pony, was examined that day and for many days after; and I felt quite a man of the world as I ran my hands over their hocks, down their legs, looked in their mouths, and said, "Just run him out again." Fortunately, though I put on the appearance of knowing what I was about, I had really little confidence in my own judgment, and so George came home again and helped me in my search.

The news soon spread that the "Parson wanted a hobby;" and, early and late, beasts of all descriptions were on view in the back-yard, and I went to bed each night stiff and sore from galloping them in the field, and jumping them over a hurdle. Lessons over, I was pretty sure to find three or four animals ready for inspection, and I began business at once.

Old Bacon would come round to the study window, as I was putting on my boots, and inform me that "one-eyed Jack," the pig-dealer, was waiting with a likely

looking animal; but, "if you will be ruled by me, you'll ha' nothing to say to him: he's the most outdacious willain outside jail, and if you don't mind what you're arter he'll stick you as sure as a gun."

On going to the stable-yard there was Jack, he of the one eye (the other having been kicked out by a lively pig as he was shoving it into his cart years ago), the most shifty looking fellow in the county, and his looks did not belie him. He might be any age, from twenty to fifty; clean shaved, sallow complexioned, oily mannered, voluble tongued, long coated, and tight trowsered. He stood chewing a straw whilst he flicked the pony he had brought with a long pig-whip, and so made it look lively, and, as he said, "fit to run for a man's life." In spite of our having all our wits on the alert, he extracted from us a description of all we required in a pony, and then proceeded to point out that his beast was all we desired.

"Ain't big enough, ain't he? Well, just you stand here. I ha'n't a-measured him, but he ain't far short of 14. 2, as you'll see, without me a-tellin' on you. How old is he? Well, sir—but there, you look in his mouth yerself. It's not the lessest good of me a-tellin' a lot of lies, which ain't my way, and you can tell his age from his mouth a sight better nor me; I never was no judge of age—rising five now, ain't he, sir? Got all his work afore him. Oh, his legs are clean enough. A splint? no, that ain't a splint. I'll tell you how he came by that. You see, as I was a-puttin' him into my trap the other day, my little nipper (boy) was a-crowdin' his barrow about the yard, and ran it up agin his legs; and, ever since, there's been a kinder lump there; but, lor', that's of no account. I

believe the pony to be as sound as a bell, and a real good useful crittur. No one never did see one of his breed that warn't a good one—he's a Prickwillow, which in course, as you know, ain't to be beat in the county, nor out of it. Mr. Besum sold this here pony's half-brother for 95 guineas, not a month back, and it warn't a patch on this 'un—not that I'm axing you half that. You see this here's right poor; I never gi'es him no corn, and he has to work hard—he'll be worth a lot of money arter you've had him a month or two. Jump? lor' bless you, there ain't nothin' as can stow him—he'd fly the moniment, he would; but, howsomever, that ain't no good a-talking, just put your leg over him, and if you don't say he's a sweet mover, I don't know what is what. Let him have his head, he won't run away, a child might ride him. He'd carry your Ma—she don't ride? no, well, if she once got atop of him she werry soon would, or I am mistaken. What do I ask for him? well, twenty-five pound; and, as you're a gentleman, I don't mind throwing you back half-a-crown for luck. He's the cheapest pony I ever seed. And I'll tell you how I let him go for so little. He was sold at auction, in dispute, and I got him for werry little; and as I don't look to make much, you may have him for what I tell you, but not a farden less. I ain't one of them as says one thing and means another—ask them as knows me if I am. You won't have him? Well, you know your own mind best, but you'll be wexed arterwards, for I know you can't find another like him. What would you be willin' to offer? I should like a deal. No? Well then, I'll wish you good mornin', and I hopes you'll suit yourself. I ha'nt no need to press you to *buy*, for I've only to show him on Long Acre next

Saturday to get more than I'm axing you: good mornin'."

After a fortnight, during which I spent some hours of each day looking at ponies, I at last bought one of a large farmer for the sum I had at my command, and was well pleased with my purchase; for though he was what in the Eastern Counties is called "a resolute one," and "a bull of a horse," which means he would have his own way if he could, by fair means or foul, and that he rushed at his jumps like a mad bull, trusting more to luck than manners to land him safely, yet I got a lot of fun and hard work out of him, and in the end he owed me nothing.

The one condition on which I was allowed to keep "Stubbs"—for so I called the pony—was that I did all the grooming myself; and at first the poor beast stood in some risk of having his hide currycombed, brushed, washed and dried off his flesh; but this furor for amateur stable-work soon wore off, and I was content if my pony was free from dirt, and looked as well as my neighbours'. Then I had the saddle and bridle to clean, the stable to sweep; and the result was an odour of stable all over the house; and my hands chapped dreadfully in the winter from having them constantly wetted while cleaning bits, stirrups, &c.; but I did not mind this, it looked so very real and groom-like.

"Stubbs" soon taught me what "a resolute pony" meant; for, as soon as he was put upon corn, he got "**above himself**," and measured his powers of putting me down against mine of keeping up, and a hard and long-protracted struggle we had, and it was not till after months of practice and dozens of falls, that I finally succeeded in conquering him. Some days he would trot

along as quiet as a sheep, but when he did put on his parts it was always at the most inopportune moments. For instance, once, when I was approaching Marshford, and had just cocked my hat, pulled down my trowsers, and brushed forward my hair at the sight of Miss

MY NEW PONY.

Simper's girl-school, walking two and two on the side of the road, Stubbs, whilst going at an easy canter on the grass, suddenly swung round like a weather-cock, and, as I continued in the old direction, I came scrambling to the ground.

The two leading girls—the two eldest, and therefore

the two that should have set the best example in the school—gave a loud giggle, but were quickly checked by the gaunt and severe-looking governess, who brought up the rear, and who I hoped would give them the extra lesson they so richly deserved when they got back to the school. Ever after I went into Marshford in fear and trembling, dreading to meet that bevy of sprouting beauty, as much as the old lady in her pony-carriage does a traction engine.

On another occasion, when I had got myself up regardless of trouble and expense in white duck trowsers, well strapped down, in order to go to a horticultural show where I expected to meet a lot of friends, the vicious Stubbs kicked me over his head on to the gravel drive, which being bright red and very wet, necessitated a change of my never-mention-ums. *Three* times over I essayed to start, and each time with the same result; and it ended in my having to put on my cloth trowsers, having come to the end of all the white ducks I possessed. The fact was I dare not nip the saddle, for the straps were so tight under my Wellington boots, that something must have given way had I done so. The pony knew this as well as I did, spiteful beast! for, when he had spoilt the three pair of whites and I had on my easy cloth, he walked off quite quietly.

A neighbouring parson, who thought himself no end of a swell on horseback, once borrowed him, to haste to a wedding that he had to perform some three miles away; and being late, so in a great hurry, he pushed Stubbs along till just in sight of the church; when the pony, thinking so rapid a progress wanted checking, stopped dead, and the parson found himself floundering in a muddy puddle. He picked himself up, and spent

half an hour walking in a ring round and round Stubbs, vainly endeavouring to re-mount him, and then another ten minutes in trying to lead the beast. It ended in his having to leave the pony tied up to a gate—in his breaking the bridle, and the parson having to give me a new one—in the marriage being performed after canonical hours—and the parson having to walk home!

I enjoyed the laugh against my friend; for I often took long rides with him, when he would for ever be finding fault with my seat, with the way I held my reins, and was besides a meddlesome, fussy fellow, who, having little to do, was for ever interfering with what did not concern him; and only a short time before this, he had got me into a row with my father by telling of some of my numerous misdoings.

In a general way, the juvenile rustic is anything but sharp; but there are exceptions to all rules, and once when riding with the fussy parson, I heard a stolid-looking small boy shut him up like a telescope. Since the days when commons were enclosed, the small farmers had been in the habit of breaking the law by letting their animals graze on the side of the lanes; and, as it was no one's business to put the law in force against them, and they did little harm, no one interfered, till Mr. Fussy took it into his head to wage war against "all strayers." We were riding down a lane one autumn afternoon, and the road under the oaks was strewn with acorns, when we came upon a small urchin, sitting on a gate, "minding" some dozen grunters that were busily engaged in munching up the acorns. Mr. Fussy flared up in a moment, and, riding up to the boy, demanded of him in a tone of great excitement, "Boy, whose pigs are *those*?"

Boy, indifferently: "Old Sow's, forrad."

"You young idiot, I don't mean that—Who is their *master?*"

"Hinder little black pig—a flamer to foight."

On dashes Fussy in a towering rage, declaring that the stupidity of the rural labourers is past belief;—an assertion that I think my readers will require a better proof of, than this boy's answers!

CHAPTER XXIII.

REASON OR INSTINCT.—THE GOOSEBERRY PICKER.—GOING TO SCHOOL.—TWO WAYS OF TELLING A TALE.

It has been a disputed question for some time, whether dogs have only instinct, or whether they have both instinct and reason; and I do not know what decision the learned world have come to on the subject. It is not easy to determine where instinct ends, and reason begins; but I think the following anecdote of old Pepper will convince my readers, as it did me, that this dog used reason. I was staying at Cromer, and had taken my dogs with me. Pepper at once took kindly to the salt water, and delighted in being tossed about on the breakers. After breakfast each morning, I took the dogs down to a groin, or breakwater, just on the right side of the pier, where the beach to the north had piled up against the boarding, and encroached on the sea, whereas on the south side it had receded, and the sea gained on the shore. By standing close to the water's edge on the north side, and throwing a stick over into the sea, Pepper was able to have a good header; and, picking it up, he would swim some twenty yards along the south side, land, and gallop round with it. One *morning*, having no stick I threw a piece of flat board

for him. In he went and seized it, but just as he did so he saw a cork bung floating a little further on. He swam to it, and made several futile attempts to get this into his mouth, with the board; but, not being able to do so, he started off to the shore, and, galloping round, deposited the board at my feet; and then, without a moment's hesitation, plunged again into the sea, and swam about till he found the bung and retrieved that

PEPPER AT CROMER.

also; and all this he did without a word being spoken to him. In my opinion this was reason, not instinct.

Anyone who has been accustomed to work lurchers must have seen a dog start a rabbit or a hare in the open, and, instead of *following* it, bolt off to a wood, a hole, or some safe place which he knows the animal will eventually make for, and there stand, ready to pick it up. This again must be reason.

My memory furnishes me with two anecdotes of

Wasp, where I think both instinct and reason were shown.

Wasp was some nine years old before she had ever been to the busy town of Marshford. At last, one day I allowed her to follow the carriage; and, on putting the horse up at the livery stables, I told her to jump on the seat and lie down.

I then started off to a flower show in the Bishop's gardens, on quite the opposite side of Marshford, but turning in here and there to do a little shopping by the way. I stopped in the gardens about two hours, and then returned to the carriage, but no Wasp was there; and the ostler told me he had seen some boys driving a dog, answering my description, out of the yard some half hour before, but that he did not know it belonged to me. I went at once to the police station, and left word there of my loss; referring them, should they find the dog, to a friend of mine who lived in the town. I then went back to the Bishop's gardens, to look up my friend and tell him what I had done; but what was my astonishment, on finding him, to see Wasp jogging at his heels, with a queer scared look on her face. Her joy at seeing me was equal to mine at finding her; and, when we had exchanged our greetings, my friend told me the dog had come to him a few minutes after I had left the gardens, having evidently traced me out through all the intricacies of the streets of Marshford. Another curious point in it was that the dog had seen my friend but once before.

Shortly after this, I went by train to a small town about twenty miles from Marshford, where I was to stay. I took Wasp with me, in the railway carriage; and at night I shut her up in a stable, and after

looking round to see that all was secure, I locked her in. The next morning I found she had pushed open a wooden shutter and made her escape. I searched and inquired all through the town, and could hear nothing of her till I got to the station; when the guard came up to me and said, "That's a clever little dog of yours, sir: it came to the station this morning, just as the first train was starting for Marshford, and got into a first-class carriage, but as it would not show a ticket I turned it out; but it must have been too deep for me, for, on opening the door of a carriage at Marshford, it bolted out and was gone through the crowd in a moment." On reaching home the same night, I was told that Wasp appeared at the door shortly after breakfast; but that she had been restless and uneasy all day, evidently thinking I was lost. I went to the kennel to reassure her and take her some food, and she was overjoyed to welcome me home.

Wasp had never been in a train before, nor had she ever been to the town from which she escaped! I am ready to vouch for the truth of these anecdotes.

The pitiably low rate of wages the agricultural labourers were receiving when I was a boy, and the fearful difficulties the poor creatures had to contend against, drove many of them to commit crimes that they otherwise would never have thought of; and their companions, knowing the great temptations they were beset with, learnt to sympathise with them; and thus it became no disgrace, or only a very small one, if a man was convicted of poaching, or stealing; and, though this is fast dying out—thanks to better wages, better education, better means of transport, and a wider spread of wholesome literature—yet there still remains a taint

of the old evil, and it will, I fear, remain for many a day.

There were many examples of perfectly honest men amongst the labourers, such as old Bacon; but I must confess that others to my knowledge pilfered in the most barefaced manner; but I think the coolest hand at it I ever knew, was the wife of a man named "Boiler," who had for years been employed by my father, and who, unlike hundreds of others, had not the excuse of poverty, as she had no children, and her husband earned more than any other labourer in the village; moreover Mrs. Boiler herself constantly added to the amount by doing a day's work in the rectory gardens.

Old Bacon was the first to open our eyes to what was going on, by various hints that he gave us, and also by the way he shunned his fellow workman; and, at last, though he hated the business of informer, he brought a direct accusation against the woman.

It was a most curious fact that, though we had a great number of gooseberry and currant bushes in the garden, we never had half enough fruit to serve the house, and that year after year Mrs. Boiler, from her half dozen bushes, could make up the deficiency, and regularly sold to my mother all that she wanted for preserves and jellies. We boys were at first supposed to eat so many off the bushes, ripe and unripe, that there were none left for the house; and, when we indignantly denied the accusation, Mrs. Boiler laid the blame on old Wasp, and tried to prove her charge by showing that the poor old dog would eat a few when given her. At last old Bacon called me into the stable one day and asked, "Did your Ma buy any gooseberries of Mrs. Boiler, this morning?"

"Yes," I answered, "a lot."

"Well, darn me, I can't hold my tongue no longer. Why, look you here now, Master Harry; that Mrs. Boiler picked them all in this garden just at day-break this werry mornin'; and, what is more, the old warmint never so much as took the trouble to carry them home afore she sold 'em. They were under her husband's jacket, in the wood-house, from the time she picked 'em till she took 'em in to your Ma. Why, sir, she ha'nt one of them yaller hairy sort in all her garden, and yet she sold your Ma a lot in that basket. I seed 'em with my werry own eyes. Has your Ma ordered any more?"

"Yes," I said; "I heard her say she would take all Mrs. Boiler could spare, and Mrs. Boiler promised to bring some more as soon as she could pick them."

"Well now, Master Harry, du you get up to-morrow mornin' afore day-break, and be on the look out. If you don't see her a-gathering 'em with your own eyes, don't say no more about what I've been telling on you. Don't say the lessest word to no one, but just you get up."

I did get up, and so found myself, half asleep, sitting on an empty bee-skep (hive) in the old bees' house, peeping out over the long rows of bushes, just as the first grey of the morning began to top the trees. I had not long to wait. Soon, the latch of the garden gate went click, and then Mrs. Boiler appeared, sauntering along, a big basket on her arm, with an appearance of security, that showed she had been there many a time on just such another errand. It struck me I might just as well wait till she had filled her basket, and thus save some honester person the labour and trouble, so I

sat quite still, till she stood up, gave her basket a rattle, and then proceeded down the path. I slipped out, and, coming up unperceived behind her, took the basket from her hand and said, "Let me take the gooseberries in for you, Mrs. Boiler; it will save you the trouble, and my mother the necessity of paying for them."

She never said a word, but turned deadly white, and then looked as if she would like to eat me. My father would not prosecute the woman; but, after giving her and her husband a severe but kind lecture, they were told never to come on the premises again. Naturally, they thought themselves the aggrieved ones, and showed this by never speaking to any of the family again, and by going off to the Ranters the very next Sunday.

I have said that I got over the separation from my brother and chum by the help of time, the old dogs and new pony; and so I did, as far as outward appearances went; but there was a great want of spark in my life, and at no time was this more evident than when shut up in the study with my father over Valpy, Barnard Smith, Euclid, and Co., and at last it was thought best that I should be sent to school. I shall not trouble my young readers with all the heart-burnings I endured at saying good-bye to all my friends, man and beast, animate and inanimate; but will pass it over and merely say that what I had looked forward to as destruction to all happiness soon proved only a new life, with new amusements and enjoyments that reached their climax when, a year later, I had the pride and delight of showing Bob round the school-grounds and introducing him as a new fellow to all my school friends; and then, after *piloting* him through the first half, we boys found *ourselves* again at the old beck, with Pepper and Wasp

sniffing about, swarms of rats, and six-weeks' holiday to devote to our favourite sport.

An old sailor once told me the following anecdote:—Two able-bodied seamen were stopped fighting, below decks, and taken before the first lieutenant, who said, "So you fellows have been fighting. Jack, tell me your version of this affair."

"Well, sir, you see, sir, me and Bill were below, 'anging up our 'ammocks; says I, 'Bill,' says I, 'when you 'ave done of 'anging up your 'ammock, would you be so kind and condescending as to get out of the way that I may 'ang mine up?'"

"No, sir, them warn't the words he made use on: he says, says he, 'Hout you beggar, hout, or I'll knock your blessed heyes hout.'"

You see, there are two ways of telling a tale. I have told mine as well as I can, and I only hope there is no Bill to come forward and tell a different version!

THE END.

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